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SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 635. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 2ND, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 635.] For the Week Ending March 2nd, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Buff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom briefed a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in st. angling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

I.—THE FATE OF THE BANTRY PEERAGE.

"THE Marquis of Bantry, sir."

Mr. Pontifex's clerk—a tall man in rusty black, with the stoop of a clergyman and the voice of a butler—announced the great solicitor's latest client and then squeezed himself respectfully against the massive door of the private room as the Marquis passed in. He drew it to and latched it before regaining his seat at a desk which practically guarded the approach to Mr. Pontifex's sanctum.

The clerk himself was rather deaf and made both a safe and determined sentry. Not that anything less than a scream or a pistol-shot could have penetrated to the outer world through the stout walls and door of Mr. Pontifex's apartment.

The solicitor had risen to meet his visitor. The card sent in by the Marquis lay on the writing-table; he had just put down a swan quill in a gold and cornelian holder.

The Marquis of Bantry took in at a glance the solid yet tasteful luxury of the room, the rare old steel prints in their handsome frames, the Afghan carpet, the antique oak furniture. He noticed the easy self-possession of the lawyer's bearing, the elegance of his dress, the value and beauty of his jewellery. When, therefore, an instant later, the peer bowed to the solicitor, it was not the salutation of a superior to an inferior, but the bow of one gentleman to another.

"Mr. Pontifex," he said, accepting the seat which the lawyer suggested with a smile and a silent gesture, "I come upon a singular errand."

"Most of my clients, Lord Bantry," observed Mr. Pontifex, reassuringly, "have the same confession to make."

"So I understood," answered the Marquis, "indeed, that is why I am here—attracted, if I may say so, by your remarkable reputation. You are doubtless a busy man, Mr. Pontifex, and I will come to the point at once. You may have heard that my daughter, Lady Julia Ennis, is to be married shortly to Mr. Cecil Stratton, the son of Mr. Lucas Stratton, who will be known to you in connection with the Stock Exchange."

"The wedding is expected to prove one of the most brilliant of the season," rejoined the solicitor, courteously. He was studying the grey-headed soldierly figure before him.

The marriage to which the Marquis had referred was furnishing materials for endless gossip in smart circles. Lord Bantry was an Irish peer, who, as a youth, had inherited a splendid title and a wrecked fortune. Now, in his old age, he was stooping to ally his blue blood with the gold of a mushroom millionaire. He acknowledged Mr. Pontifex's compliment with a sigh.

"Julia is young, pretty, and really in love," he said gloomily, "and Cecil Stratton is a good fellow who worships the ground she walks on. But it is necessary for me to confess to you, Mr. Pontifex, that his father has only

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consented to the marriage because he believes that Julia will, one of these days, be a peeress in her own right, with remainder to her children. My daughter was to become the wife of Cecil Stratton in virtue of her position as the last of the Ennises, her husband was to take the name of Stratton-Ennis, and the Stratton millions were to restore prosperity to the house of Bantry."

Mr. Pontifex chose a small revolver and pocketed it.

"Pardon my observing, Lord Bantry," interposed the solicitor; "that you speak in the past tense. Am I to conclude that some obstacle to the marriage has arisen or may arise?"

The Marquis leant towards his questioner. "You have guessed rightly," he replied, in a low tone; "whether you can help me or not remains to be seen. Yet it is in that hope I have sought you."

Mr. Pontifex played with his ring—a ring that mounted a superb emerald. He did not speak—it was his habit to wait for confidences.

"Most people have forgotten by now," went on Lord Bantry; "that I had once two sons, Valentine, Viscount Athlone, and Stephen his younger brother. The Ennis blood ran in their veins, they were both wild—as wild as their great-grandfather, the Black Marquis of the Georges. Their passion was hunting—hunting and steeple-chasing. Valentine was just past his majority, Stephen nearing it, when, in a steeple-chase in which both were riding, their horses collided at a bad wall-jump and came down together. Stephen was picked up dead and frightfully crushed."

The Marquis faltered and turned his face away. Mr. Pontifex was watching him closely.

"Soon afterwards," murmured Lord Bantry, "Athlone left Ireland for the East. He ceased to communicate with us, drawing his allowance through an agent in Cairo, and leading a wandering, adventurous, misanthropic existence. Ultimately we heard of his death. That was the way in which Julia became the heiress of Bantry."

As the Marquis described the fate of his elder son his tone grew hard and dry—there had been grief in it when he mentioned the death of his younger one.

"A melancholy story, Lord Bantry," said Mr. Pontifex; "but why recall it now?"

The Marquis of Bantry looked furtively about the quiet private room, into which the chill February noon sent a pale and unusual gleam of sunshine. Then he whispered slowly:

"It was a mistake about Athlone—a ghastly mistake; he still lives, lives! Oh, the horror of it! the horror of it!"

A flicker of shrewd interest shot across the solicitor's countenance.

"My dear Lord Bantry," he expostulated, gravely; "the Viscount is your own son. Even if his return to life should interfere with your plans for Lady Julia, you will find a welcome for him when the first shock of your—your surprise is past."

The Marquis stared at the lawyer with a strange incredulity.

"Find a welcome for Athlone!" he muttered; "you don't understand—can't you see the accident at the wall-jump was no accident at all—Stephen was murdered! murdered! and by his own brother! The whole county suspected it, Athlone had backed his horse desperately and it was first favourite. Stephen rode a weedy chestnut he had trained himself and the brute had a marvellous turn of speed. At the wall the chestnut was going easy, with everyone but Athlone beaten and distanced, and it was plain that even Athlone's horse had made his last challenge. It was then that Athlone, who was the better rider, fouled the chestnut and brought

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his own horse and himself on top of Stephen. You would say he did it in a sudden fury and repented it in sackcloth and ashes. So said I, once."

He twisted his silk handkerchief into a knot and wiped his trembling lips.

"I pitied Athlone," he said, sternly, "for I thought it was my hot temper coming out in the lad and ruining his life for ever. So I sent him abroad—for all the county cut him after that—and I starved the estate to make him an allowance. Then my Julia fell sick—she had ailed since Stephen's death—and in her delirium she betrayed the awful truth, for it had preyed on her mind long and sore."

Mr. Pontifex was certainly interested in this, nor did he take the trouble to disguise the fact. He had thrown one foot over his knee and sat with his arms folded and his brows knitted. His peculiar eyes glittered as they only did when he was, in his cold fashion, a trifle excited.

"It was no mad fury that led Athlone to kill his brother," said the Marquis, with a harsh directness that forbade sympathy; "he had sworn to do it if the chestnut was ridden in the Bantry Steeplechase. They had tried horses together and Stephen won with a stone in hand. Athlone asked him to withdraw from the race and was refused. Julia heard them quarrelling over it.

"'Very well,' Athlone told his brother, 'as sure as you ride in that race it will be your last. I'll kill you at the wall, if I do for myself into the bargain.' And he did it, as he had sworn, and earnt the curse of the father he had bereaved and dishonoured."

Lord Bantry wiped his forehead—it was dripping with perspiration.

"When I knew of it," he added, "I wrote and forbade him ever to see me again. For Julia's sake I did not tell him how I had become cognisant of his guilt, but I stopped his allowance and warned him he was as dead to me henceforth as he had made Stephen. After that I heard no more of him until there came the news, apparently accurate, of his death. And now, now he has come back—to England, to London, a miserable, broken wretch. All other sources of income have failed him, and, a criminal apparently in more lands than one, he demands money from me with menaces, threatening to ruin Julia's marriage if I refuse it."

The Marquis scanned eagerly the solicitor's expression, but not yet did Mr. Pontifex choose to indulge in any comment.

"How can I deny his demands," pursued Lord Bantry, "without shattering my last hope of restoring the Bantry fortunes, how can I in honour—even if I could bribe Athlone to silence—permit the marriage to take place under false pretences? Answer me these riddles, Mr. Pontifex, and I will give you, in three months, a blank cheque which you shall fill in as you will."

The solicitor twisted the emerald ring upon his long, firm finger—round and round it went—then stopped suddenly. Mr. Pontifex had made up his mind.

"Let me know," he said, "where I can see your son."

Lord Bantry coloured deeply.

At the sound of the solicitor's footsteps, the figure got up.

"Athlone writes," was the peer's embarrassed reply; "that he is masquerading as an Indian attendant seeking an engagement. He gives an address in Soho and insisted that I should bring or send him money. Alarmed by his threats, I yielded, and made an appointment. Had it not been for hearing your name and remarkable abilities mentioned at my club, I should have been on my way to Soho by this."

"With your permission," said Mr. Pontifex, "I will

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keep that appointment for you, Lord Bantry. May I know the address?"

"The top floor at Number Five, ——— Street, Soho," explained the Marquis; "ask, he says, for Muley Hassan."

Mr. Pontifex rose and the peer followed his example, taking up his silk hat from the lawyer's writing-table.

"One moment!" desired the solicitor; he paused himself, gazing intently at the Marquis. "You have no thought in this matter but for your daughter, Lady Julia?" he inquired; "you believed that Viscount Athlone was dead—your one wish is that he had not returned to life?"

Lord Bantry shivered as he encountered the piercing scrutiny of the solicitor. But he stiffened himself jerkily and declared:

"I have already said so—could I endure a fratricide to become Marquis of Bantry? If I had no daughter, sir, I should still wish that Athlone were dead."

Mr. Pontifex bent his head as if he had received the answer to some important question. His clerk entered, to stand inquiringly on the threshold.

"The Marquis' carriage," said the solicitor, and bowed to his client. "You have given me a difficult task, Lord Bantry," he observed; "in twenty-four hours you shall know if I have been able to help you."

The Marquis returned the salute with an old-world courtesy and passed out of the apartment. As for Mr. Pontifex, he stepped to a cupboard, took from it a dark overcoat, by no means smartly made, selected a felt hat from the half-dozen which hung in the species of closet, pushed off his patent-leather boots and donned a rougher pair.

As a last feature in his toilet he laid aside his rings and pin, locking them up in his private safe. From among several such articles in this receptacle, he chose a small and extremely plain revolver, loaded, and pocketed it. Then, unfastening a second door to the apartment, he slipped out into a gloomy corridor that reached a bye-way of St. James Street. These unceremonious disappearances were familiar to Mr. Pontifex's clerk, who was, in fact, as discreet as he was deaf.

Mr. Pontifex walked up St. James Street and strolled into Soho by way of Golden Square. He found ——— Street without trouble and made for Number Five.

It was an old and much-battered house of three stories, whose panelled door stood wide open, showing a carpetless lobby and rickety stairs.

The solicitor marched in and was investigating the entrances on the loftiest landing before anyone could have noticed his presence in the neighbourhood of Number Five.

Two out of the three entrances were bolted or otherwise secured.

From the other, which stood ajar, came certain sickly fumes that caused Mr. Pontifex to shrug his shoulders. They were those of stale opium smoke. He thrust the door inward and passed through.

On a mattress that occupied a corner of the garret lay outstretched a thin and wasted figure, clad in the limp black garments peculiar to the Indian servant in England. On its head was a cotton turban. The skin of the face was sallow and had doubtless been dyed.

The miserable wretch clung to the knees of Mr. Pontifex.

At the sound of the solicitor's footstep the figure got up.

Although the place reeked of opium and there were the instruments for smoking it on a splintered box that served as table, the occupant was not under the influence of the drug.

"Well," Mr. Pontifex was told, "I suppose you're from my lord of B. No one comes here in a month of Sundays, except on business. Now you've arrived, cut the cackle and get to the horses. What are the terms? I warn you the old man will have to stump up something handsome if he doesn't want me to cook his goose about

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Julia and Stratton. Peeress in her own right—ha-! ha!" And the figure on the mattress shook with painful laughter.

Mr. Pontifex answered with studied calmness but actual anxiety. He was about to stake his whole game on the issue of a single throw.

"I have not come to offer terms," he replied, "the Marquis is a man of honour and a law-abiding citizen. It is not easy to blackmail such a man. As his solicitor I am instructed to inform you of his decision and to prepare you for the worst. In a few moments you will be arrested and charged with the wilful murder of your brother, Lord Stephen Ennis, on the Bantry racecourse, by deliberately fouling him at an obstacle while riding in a steeplechase."

The sham native sprang up—he had turned white under his dye and his limbs were shaking.

"You are mad!" he whispered, fiercely, "mad! My father daren't do it—I tell you he daren't."

The solicitor turned away, as if indifferent to this outburst.

"He can, and will," was his retort, "or, rather I will for him. Men who take my advice, adopt a short way with such as you, Viscount Athlone, the police are already informed of your whereabouts and the nature of your crime."

Pontifex held his breath as he watched the effect of this announcement—with one hand in his pocket he was fingering the little revolver. The disguised viscount fell back in a state of shuddering collapse.

"It's a lie!" he muttered brokenly. "a lie. Stephen died by accident—it was brought in at the inquest."

"Yours is the lie," said Mr. Pontifex, mercilessly; "you swore to kill your brother at the wall-jump if he rode the chestnut. Premeditation is wilful murder all the world over."

A paralysing terror had seized upon Valentine, Viscount Athlone. But he strove desperately to maintain a defiant front.

"What—what evidence," he gasped, "has been trumped up in support of this fantastic charge?"

"None has been invented," responded the solicitor, still trifling with the revolver in his pocket, "because there was no need. Your words were, 'As sure as you ride in that race it will be your last—I will kill you at the wall, if I do for myself into the bargain.' Those words fell upon the ear of your sister Julia."

A peculiar cry, like the yelp of a shot rabbit, burst from the lips of the figure on the mattress. Mr. Pontifex stooped over it, whispering sentence after sentence of determined brutality.

"You are a dead man, Valentine Ennis," he said; "your life is forfeit to the gallows, and your sister Julia, rather than incur her father's curse, will place the rope about your neck. It would have been well for you and yours if you had died abroad—anywhere, anyhow, save by the white cap and the noose. But Justice must be done upon you to the utmost, for all your blue blood, fratricide that you are. You had better go quietly with the police whom I am about to summon."

The miserable wretch that had once been the dashing Viscount Athlone dragged himself up and clung to the knees of Mr. Pontifex.

"Don't let them take me," he wailed: "save me from that—it's all true. I did swear to Stephen to kill him if he didn't withdraw the chestnut, I did ride him down at the wall and put my horse on top of him. But don't let them hang me, anything but that! If only for the sake of my sister Julia; anything but that!"

As he grasped the solicitor's knees imploringly, Mr. Pontifex slipped the revolver from his pocket, shielding it ostentatiously in the palm of his hand.

The Viscount's eye caught it and he threw himself upon it, wrenching it from the fingers that held it, and concealing it instantly. Yet he flung at Mr. Pontifex such a look of imaginary comprehension and gratitude that the stern heart of the solicitor sickened for a moment at the part he was playing.

"You have five minutes," he said significantly, and with that crept away down the uneven stairs.

In the lobby below he halted—he himself was trembling, somewhere in the recesses of his iron frame. What seemed an eternity stole by, and then came a curious and distant sound, faint and crisp, like the crack of a whip-lash on a frosty morning or the noise of a cork drawn in a large hall.

For a second Mr. Pontifex closed his eyes; when he opened them his face bore its usual cool expression. He walked out into the street and passed southwards across Soho.

Mr. Pontifex re-entered his private room by the door at the back, which was reached by a gloomy corridor from a bye-street. He hung up his outer garments, and resumed his rings and pin.

Afterwards, as he had some unimportant business letters to write, Mr. Pontifex began to write them.

* * * * *

At noon the following day the Marquis of Bantry called at the office of Hugo Pontifex.

The solicitor greeted him impassively and handed him an early edition of an evening paper.

Mr. Pontifex's thumb was on a small paragraph. it was headed:

STRANGE SUICIDE!

A man was found dead last evening in a room in —— Street. He was known in the neighbourhood as Muley Hassan, and was supposed to be an Indian servant out of employment. He had committed suicide by shooting himself with a miniature revolver, which he still clutched tightly. The doctor who examined the body says that it is that of a European, the face and arms having been dyed yellow as a sort of disguise. He was believed to be in extremely poor circumstances, and doubtless this was the reason for the rash act.

The Marquis raised himself sternly to his full height. It seemed as if a great weight had been rolled from his shoulders.

"Fortune, I see, still watches over the house of Bantry," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "I regret I troubled you to no purpose, Mr. Pontifex."

The solicitor frowned, almost imperceptibly.

"No one ever does that, Lord Bantry," he answered, "I persuaded your son that you had placed the matter in the hands of the police—that they were, in fact, at his very door. But be reassured, I will not include in my bill—the cost of a 'miniature revolver.'"

The Marquis of Bantry shrank from Hugo Pontifex.

"They told me truly," he murmured; "when they said that you had never failed a client yet. But you are a strange man, Mr. Pontifex, a strange and terrible man. Nevertheless, I am greatly your debtor."

"Quite so," replied Mr. Pontifex, drily, for he had noticed the Marquis's involuntary shudder, "but I think I acted as much in the Viscount's interest as yours. He was, I discovered, an inveterate opium-smoker. As it happens, I once saw the death of an opium-maniac. If I tricked your son, it was into a less painful end than Nature had in store for him."

And, with characteristic curtness, he rang the bell for the peer to be shown out.

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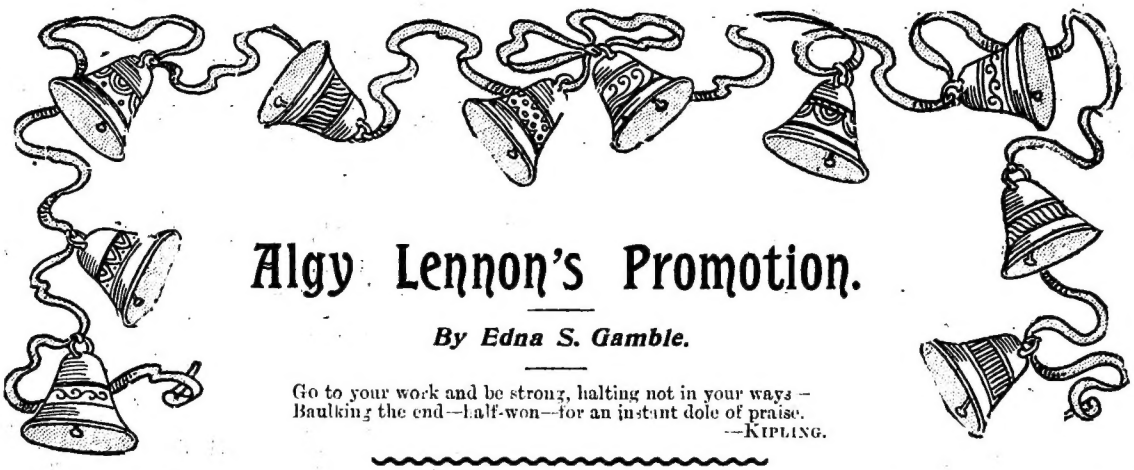

Algy Lennon's Promotion.

By Edna S. Gamble.

Go to your work and be strong, halting not in your ways—
Baulking the end—half-won—for an instant dole of praise.
—KIPLING.

"It's no fault of Algy's that he's a bit of a duke—fellows can't help these things, they're born so; but where Algy shows his sense is that he keeps it in the background—doesn't let it worry him you know, sir, and that's why he's such a favourite on the *Pegasus*."

The R.M.S. *Pegasus*, laden with mails, frozen mutton, and some two hundred odd passengers, ploughed her way up North from Sydney.

She had called at Brisbane for the Queensland mails that morning, and now, some few hours later, she steamed on in the teeth of a stiff breeze that had "slewed round from Southerly to the Eastward out of pure cussedness."

At least that was how the slangy and somewhat cheeky young Third explained matters, as he tied his long legs into a knot, and prepared to make himself entertaining to one of the most interesting passengers so far, of the trip.

Ex-Admiral Copley was on his way home by the Western Route and the Canadian and Pacific Railway.

After the manner of the man retired from the services, he was inclined to be reserved and taciturn. He had a characteristic way with him too of setting his mind in true British bull-dog fashion on a thing, and "seeing it through."

Just now, the object of his interest was the Second of the *Pegasus*, in whose interests he was allowing himself to be talked to in a fatherly sort of way by the irrepressible Third, Tony Harrowby, a young Australian but newly joined, and with all the free and easy dash of his undisciplined nation.

It was that dog-tired time of day on ship board, the interval between lunch and afternoon tea, and the object of their special attention kept his middle watch on the bridge.

Algy Lennon was a universal favourite. Of a medium height, well knit, with the true blue eyes of the sailor, the fresh, cold tub English complexion on his clean-shaven face, and that quiet air of assurance in manner and movement that is the mark of his class, Algy Lennon was a man to attract the most casual observer.

"Um!" muttered the Admiral, as he looked up at the calmly immovable features of the man on the bridge—his keen eyes piercing, as though gifted with an extra sense, what appeared to the uninitiated but a grey, foam-flecked waste—"um! so that's Mr. Algy Lennon—well, in plain English, Mr.—er—ah——"

"Tony," explained the irrepressible Third, "Tony Harrowby."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Harrowby—what do you know of Mr. Lennon's family?"

"Well, you know, sir, his aunt is the famous Duchess of Montsevern; for his mother was one of the three beautiful daughters of Sir James Raynham—only—there's a sort of family scandal or something that Algy's mother was mixed up in—and, well, he's a bit touchy on the point, and shy of mentioning her. He left home, so he told Morton, (Morton's our chief, you know) when he was thirteen—cut the whole family in fact. You see Algy has got some rum ideas on family honour and pride and all that sort of thing that a fellow out here doesn't understand exactly."

"No, I suppose not," interpolated his patient listener. "Well, go on, I'm interested in Lennon."

"Oh, well, you know he served through the usual apprenticeship on a sailing ship, and that, combined with sausage and mash at fourpence for lunch, and less than that for dinner didn't improve his temper, but it did him a lot of good some ways though, came in handy when he was wrecked on the Falklands some two years later."

"They do not indulge in 'sausage and mash at fourpence' on the Falklands, young man," the Admiral interposed rather testily.

He had the true British love of solidity, and the flippant tone and seeming levity of the Third irritated him.

Tony Harrowby looked sideways at him, as though he had unconsciously touched a dangerous explosive. He shifted his position uncertainly, and untied his long legs preparatory to making a hasty retreat if necessary.

"Go on," commanded the upper deck voice of the Admiral.

"Oh—er—yes," went on Tony, "he had funny experiences in London; sitting on doorsteps, and all that sort of thing; watching his beautiful mamma drive by in her victoria; he used to sneak round by Hyde Park Corner and watch her—she didn't see him, of course."

"So I should suppose," muttered the Admiral, pulling complacently at his well-trimmed Navy beard, "the young dog's got some grit in him, I thought I wasn't mistaken. Well," (in louder tones) "and you say he had fever in the Falklands?"

"Oh, yes; he was laid up there about six weeks, and had a pretty bad time, all the nurses in the convent

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lost their hearts to him. You can fancy Algy looking like a fallen angel to order, can't you?"

"He's got a bit of temper, though, this idol of yours, Harrowby, or I'm much mistaken."

The cautious old sea-dog was feeling his way—taking soundings all along the run.

"Should just jolly well think he has," cried Harrowby. "I've only had the luck to see him in a real scot once, and that was about a photo—photo of a girl, you know," he added in a confidential aside.

"Not at all unusual," muttered his listener, "gay young dog. I like that in a boy."

The latter half of his sentence was not intended for the ears of Harrowby.

"Yes, it was last voyage, he was Third then and I was Fourth—had only just joined. We were a day out, and Lennon was getting out things and faking up the cabin a bit. He had heaps of photos; but one, a girl in a silver frame, was different from all the others. She looked as plain and simple and solid as the frame itself. 'She's no Sydney girl,' I said to myself when I saw it. I was looking at it when Algy came down to turn in from his watch at twelve. I ought to have been asleep, but I had been doing Logarithms till late and couldn't get off. The girl in the silver frame was the only thing I couldn't take my eyes off. She made a fellow feel good, somehow—as if his mother wasn't far off."

"I know," muttered the Admiral. "Go on."

He was of the type of man who never allowed himself to feel—he "did things."

"Well, I said, just in a joky way like: 'Say, Lennon, that's the bestest girl, I suppose, the one in the silver frame?' I had not seen his face as he came in, but it seemed he had been grizzling, and no wonder, it was a filthy night, a real picnic. I didn't want to look long when I turned round. 'You cheeky young ass,' he thundered, 'what business on earth is it of yours who my photos are?' He apologised in the morning—said he was in a scot with the boy who had been sent down for his oilskins and was pretty well half-an-hour finding them—raining in sheets all the time."

He paused—his listener was rubbing his hands as if enjoying the little incident.

"Of course I asked no other questions, but next day the photo was missing from the place where it hung over the head of his bed—and I've never seen it since."

Ex-Admiral Copley drew out his watch.

"When does Lennon come off duty?"

"In an hour's time—at four—I must be off too."

"Well bring him along here, will you, to tea with me?"

Lennon's comment on the invitation was characteristic of him.

"Wonder what the old Shellback wants with me?"

But he went.

A steward had carefully placed a tray to the Admiral's order near his deck chair on the poop aft, under the awning. The quartermaster, with the regularity of a machine struck eight bells. A minute later two fine specimens that made the old sea dog's heart swell with pride, swung along the glistening white decks towards him.

"Admiral Copley—Mr. Lennon, sir," cried Harrowby in his snap-shot voice—and for once, to his credit be it told, he retreated tactfully.

"Happy to know you, Mr. Lennon—sit down, sir," said the Admiral with his fine old-fashioned courtesy, as he indicated a chair on his left. "Sorry there are no ladies to meet you, don't think many of 'em have turned up yet, so perhaps you will put up with a crusty old bachelor for once, eh? Tea—then may I trouble you to officiate."

"You cheeky young ass! What business is it of yours?"

"Thank you—yes—delighted," answered Lennon with that frank directness of tone that attracted most people to him, and his present host in particular.

They spoke of much, and of many things in common, and Richard Copley's opinion of Algy Lennon grew more and more confirmed.

It was little more than a week since he had asked him to tea on the poop, and the *Pegasus* lay alongside the wharf at Honolulu. It was evening, the mails were

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aboard, and a festive band of natives who were seeing off some friends, were making merry on deck.

The native instruments, and still more native dances were not to the taste of the Admiral, especially when copious libations of whiskey added *esprit* to the proceedings. He had gone below to look the surgeon up.

He stood by the door of his cabin, which joined on to the surgery and library, and enjoyed a quiet smoke with Vircoe, who was not at all a bad fellow, he had found. He had been laying neat little plans all day, and it was as much to those as to the Bacchanalia on deck that Vircoe owed the pleasure of his visit. He had tried every wile he knew to get an invite into Lennon's cabin, for he owned to a singular curiosity about the girl in the silver frame that Harrowby had mentioned.

No mention of anyone answering that description had passed Lennon's lips in the course of their many conversations in the smoke-room or on deck. Lennon loved to get the Admiral to talk of the old days of his cadetship in the gun-room of the *Briseus* and how they had come out on top in the manœuvres of '68.

Vircoe's room was in an alley way leading off the main deck where the officers' cabins were, and Lennon's was the one immediately opposite. By careful inquiry of his steward the Admiral had found out that the Second was in his room.

"The young dog's as proud as Lucifer—he won't ask me in for fear of risking a refusal of my patronage—yet I like him all the better for it."

"This is—er—I presume—"
"My wife, sir!"

This was very much how Richard Copley's thoughts ran as he sent the smoke rings from a fine Manilla curling to the roof.

Vircoe, who had the camera mania, was, just then, too absorbed in developing photos of some fine angolas on board to notice the abstracted mood of his guest.

The handle of the door that he had been watching so carefully turned quickly, and the object of his thoughts swung out as if to walk down the main deck unaware of the presence of his friend.

"Hi, Lennon!—excuse me, Vircoe, but I want to see Lennon," and the old sea-dog blundered over the brass bound doorsill nearly into the arms of the astonished Second.

"I say, Lennon, don't you think it's about time you returned the compliment, and asked me into your room for a smoke?"

Lennon flushed. The Admiral's determination was too obvious to be ignored this time. He rose to the occasion.

"I did not know, sir, that you would care to. I shall be most happy to welcome you now if you care to come in."

His late excellency Admiral Copley, enjoying a quiet smoke in the room deputed to the use of the Second Officer of a mail boat was perhaps an anomaly; but I have before remarked he was not a man to feel or think things—he did them.

"Plenty of photographs I see, Lennon—like to see a young fellow fond of the girls," he remarked, seating himself comfortably and puffing out clouds of smoke on the faces of pretty brunettes in pale tinted theatre wraps, and fair sorceresses in fancy costumes.

Lennon glanced casually round.

"These are mere chance acquaintances, sir, that one meets once, or perhaps twice in a life-time, in a life like ours—some passengers and most of them colonials."

He hesitated while the colour mounted high on his clear forehead.

"There is one I'd like to show you, Admiral Copley. I think you would appreciate it. It is not for the chance visitor who does not."

He drew out the drawer from beneath his bed and took from it the silver frame, handing it almost reverently to his guest.

The latter coughed—like most sailors he was sometimes at a loss for a word.

"This is—er—I presume——"

"My wife, sir," answered Lennon.

And for once Richard Copley's self-possession nearly forsook him—he gripped the frame more firmly to assure himself of the tangibility of something.

His host was idly fingering the things on the little writing-table near the wall—his back to his guest.

With a mighty effort Richard Copley recovered speech.

"You sly young scamp, why didn't you tell me before—I congratulate you, Lennon, with all my heart and soul,"—he glanced again at the photo—"you ought to be a happy man."

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Algy took the photo from him almost jealously, smiling a bitter little smile that his guest had often noticed there before.

"Aye, sir—and would if I were not continually feeling what a fool a poor devil of a mail-boat Second is to allow himself to be human—on his pay."

A look of pain drew a thin sharp line where the lips with their easy curves closed.

The inscrutable face of Ex-Admiral Copley betrayed nothing—he waited, having found the root of the canker worm—to see its length.

"You see, sir, promotion is—well you know what it is in the services, it's no better here, and rather worse if anything, and a fellow gets sick of waiting for his R.N.R. Commission, badly as they say the Navy wants recruiting—and the odds are he doesn't even get it at all."

"How long have you sent in your application?" queried Admiral Copley.

"Eighteen months," and Lennon passed his hand wearily over his young face that seemed to have suddenly grown years older as he sank on his bed behind him. "And the worst of it is there's another promotion waiting for me when I get back that was to have been conditional on the other—I know *she* wanted it so."

He paused with a hard, dry lump in the throat.

The Admiral, who knew his book of human nature very well, did not ask who she might be; he merely glanced at the drawer where Algy had carefully laid the photo, locking it after him.

He also made a very shrewd guess at the nature of the other promotion—the promotion that fate seemed to be so prodigal with—deserved or undeserved.

"Where do you expect to get the cable, Lennon?"

The question might have seemed irrelevant to a novice in the school of life, but the two men understood.

"At Brisbane, sir, on the way back. I've been on the rack coming up, it will be far worse going down."

The undemonstrative man of the sea laid his hand on the arm of his young friend.

"I say, Lennon, cheer up, there's a good sort of chap; why, there might be a double promotion when you get down again, old man, the Admiralty is a slow going machine but sure; it takes a bit of starting, that's all."

And as the smoke rings curled upward, Richard Copley pondered in his slow-moving brain how best one could "do things," whether from New York or Vancouver.

His roving eye caught the clock.

"I say, young fellow, if you're going to be fresh for the middle watch, it's about time you turned in; and—I say Lennon, send me a cable just to say how things turn out, will you? The Senior Navy Club, New York, will find me."

And the two men parted with a better appreciation of each other that increased daily till the end of the voyage.

Ex-Admiral Copley, late of the South Pacific Fleet, sat in the smoke room of the Senior Navy Club N.Y.

"Seems to me, Mabel, he hasn't the Lennon phiz at all."

He was pondering over the wording of a cable, an answer to one he had just received. It ran:

"Promoted to father and Lieutenant R.N.R. Boy and mother splendid."

He filled up the form before him at last to his own satisfaction and handed it to the coloured boy who waited by the door.

"H'm—so the machine has worked at last," he reflected as the door closed; "only wanted a little oiling, I suppose. Wonder if Lennon will guess I had a hand in it?"

And a complacent smile crept over the weather-beaten, kindly old face of Richard Copley as he thought of another satisfactory cable he had received.

"To think that after all these years I should have found little Kate and her bairns—suppose there'll be a batch of boys who want to get into the Navy, too—let me see, Sprigg does not say how many there are"—he referred to the cable he had received from his lawyer—"ah, well, Fate plays us strange tricks, and I know now why I was so struck with the girl in the silver frame."

A few hours later, as he paced the deck of the *Campania* bound for home in the teeth of a snow-laden

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wind, a couple, in a very different clime, were reading his answer with an expression of puzzled bewilderment.

It was summer with them—an Australian summer's day in December, and a moist, sultry heat, the heat that is most trying in Sydney, hung over all. The thermometer in the room that led off the wide balcony where the heat had driven them, registered, and had done for some hours, 98°.

Through the joints of the loosely strung Jap blinds, a slight breeze from time to time swept in a little purer air from over the horse-shoe bay at their feet.

Algy Lennon, in a flannel suit, a smile of ineffable content of his clear cut face and a new air of condescending patronage towards the world in general—that is, the poor unfortunate beings who happened to be living outside his world at that moment—was on duty, a new duty, and there were many observations to be taken.

He had told the nurse who had gladly retired that, "He'd take that watch and she'd better turn in when she had the chance."

The object of his observations, judging from the remarks he made at intervals, was not a thing of beauty.

"Seems to me, Mabel," he said, addressing a rather wan and white edition of the girl in the silver frame, "seems to me he must be a Playfair, he hasn't the Lennox phiz at all—not even his father's nose as a redeeming feature—and really, Mab, he's just the colour of those mud pies we used to make when we were nippers—in the half-baked stage you know."

He ducked his head to avoid the missile aimed at him by his wife and went on pacing his "quarter-deck" as she called it, singing lustily at intervals snatches from "Pinafore."

At about the fifth repetition of "stick to your desks" etc., the slandered lump of humanity he carried gave vent to a prolonged howl and was as promptly seized by his indignant mother.

"H'm, doesn't seem to appreciate Gilbert and Sullivan."

"Of course not, you stupid boy, how can you expect an infant of two weeks old to appreciate or understand *Pinafore*, why, it's what someone in the Bible, I forget who, calls 'strong meat for babies.' You must commence with nursery rhymes and work up gradually."

At this point they were disturbed by the advent of Biddy, the Irish maid, with the cable that caused such consternation. For a few moments the then *summum bonum* of their lives was relegated to a second place as they read the brief wording of the telegram:

"Congratulations on both counts from yours cordially,

"Uncle Dick.

"Senior Navy Club, New York."

"But who can it be from, Algy?" gasped Mabel Lennon at last.

"Why, it's from old Copley—Admiral Copley I told you about from Honolulu—didn't I mention his name? sorry—we took him up last time and a very decent old fossil he was, too; but why 'Uncle Dick'—has he adopted us, I wonder?"

And it was Mabel Lennon with her quick woman's instinct that solved the problem.

"Copley, did you say, Dick, why that was the Little Mater's name. She had a brother who was in the Navy, too, and we as children nearly worshipped him as a sort of mythical fairy godfather, from whom poor mother had expectations, when the family cut her off without the shilling for marrying Maurice Playfair, a curate, with no living. Uncle Dick and she were great chums, she told us, and she always felt he would have understood and been kind; but he went abroad. Oh I see it all now as plain as daylight."

"And," said Algy, slipping down on to the floor of the verandah, his head very near the one disengaged hand that rested on the ledge of the long cane chair, "and her daughter did another foolish thing and married a poor beggar of a mail-boat man, eh?"

The hand slipped down on to the head with the protective gesture that is a part of some women.

"I used to think you were the sillier of the two, dear, but you're the very cleverest goose in the wide world, for you've 'struck' uncle Richard, the family gold mine."

There was a restless movement from the flimsy looking bundle that lay on the other arm and two pairs of eyes were immediately turned on him in penitence.

"I'm afraid you've been horribly neglected, old man, but we must have an innings sometimes you know," said his proud father, "and besides we don't discover the family gold mine—and a godfather—and an uncle for you all in one, every day. Say, Mabel, we won't quarrel over the name anyway will we now, eh?"

"No, I suppose it will have to be Dick—Richard Algernon Lennon, R.N.—it fits rather well, doesn't it, Algy?"

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THE LION'S WARS

The Crimean War.

1854-6.

IT has been said that nations never realise the causes of their wars.

This may be true at the moment when the war is being waged, for party passion, and the craft of ministers seeking to disguise their real objects may keep the truth back for a time.

But the mists, as a rule, clear when the tangled threads come to be unravelled by the historian later on.

A study of the Crimean War confirms this conclusion. In France, a very large number of intelligent people believe that the war was precipitated by Napoleon III. to strengthen the crumbling foundations of his throne.

In this country, it is held by some that it was a wholly unjust war and would never have occurred had we taken the trouble to make our aims clear to Russia, others share the opinion entertained by the late Prince Consort, who, for some reason, thought it was in every way a most just war.

There is still, or rather there was, another section who considered that the Czar was justified in taking up a firm position on the question of the Holy Places as champion of the Orthodox Greek Church.

The public in general regarded the Holy Places as a transparent pretext, and declared that the Russian object was much more practical.

That indeed it was geographical, and that the emperor of the frost-bound region of the north was longing to transfer the capital to the Bosphorus in order to procure a free outlet to the Mediterranean.

One other point still lingers in the controversial region.

Did we drift into the war? Most people say we did and yet that seems doubtful, for the Emperor Nicholas had already shown his hand when his armies crossed the Pruth.

Then it was that our statesmen saw that we must fight or let Russia have her way.

How could we have drifted into war when Russia had ample time to recede months before hostilities commenced? The expedition we dispatched reached Malta, and Russia made no sign.

By the time the troops landed at Gallipoli and Scutari the attitude of the Czar was more defiant than ever. We again ask how can we be said to have slipped into war when weeks elapsed before the allied generals received orders to take Sebastopol, the fortress in the Crimea which was regarded by the Turks as a menace to the safety of Constantinople.

War having been declared, the troops embarked at Varna, landing on the shores of the Crimea in the middle of September, 1854. The British infantry was divided into five divisions of which the Duke of Cambridge commanded one, and consisted of about 26,000 men.

The cavalry, a magnificent corps, exceeded 2,000 under the command of the Earl of Lucan and the dashing Earl of Cardigan. The guns numbered sixty. The entire force was under the command of Lord Raglan, an officer who had served with distinction under Wellington in the Peninsular War.

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Equally as experienced was Marshal St. Arnaud who commanded the French troops numbering 30,000 men with sixty-eight guns. The gross total of the allied forces was 64,000 inclusive of the Turkish contingent 6,000 strong.

Splendidly situated as Great Britain is for the peaceful pursuits of trade, the advantages of our insular position in times of war are not so clear. We are safe from invasion, it is true, but the problem of how to feed and supply an army sent across the sea had never been mastered till a later time in history. How the ill-clad, half-starved soldiers who fought for us in the Crimea ever contrived to win a battle is a much greater mystery than the causes of the war.

On September 19th, the allied forces, under the protection of the fleet, marched along the coast till they reached the heights of Alma. Here they came in touch with the Russian army comprising 36,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry, and ninety guns under Prince Mentschikoff.

The heights which ran from 100ft. to 600ft. high constituted in themselves a series of natural fortresses, but their strength was added to by redoubts, trenches, and skilfully placed batteries.

Had Alma been fought towards the end of the war when the commissariat had utterly broken down it is certain we should have been defeated, but each man, according to Kinglake, carried sufficient ammunition for two battles and the means of subsistence for three. Feed the British soldier well and he will do anything and go anywhere, so with plenty of food in his knapsack, Mr. Atkins did not inquire why the heights of Alma had been selected as the point of attack.

As none of the Crimean generals have ever condescended to enlighten the world why they fought the battle of Alma we are driven to the conclusion that we engaged the Russians there because the Russians wanted us to.

It is extraordinary that Lord Raglan the moment he caught sight of the great Redoubt on the heights, with its twelve heavy guns and four batteries of field artillery to say nothing of sixteen battalions of infantry and a large force of sailors, did not exclaim:

"Not here, we will try lower down."

We had been shepherded there but no one seemed to think so.

The French on our right were so pleased at having the support of nine ships of war that they actually thought their position admirable. And so it was.

Although the heights were terribly hard to climb, the Russian engineers had omitted to strengthen them as they had done those confronting our men by artificial works. To still further increase their chances of success the guns of the French war vessels searched the heights before the troops began to scale them. As defeat would have ruined the expedition it was perhaps as well that the burden of the day should rest on our shoulders.

The Russian generals being ignorant of the quality of the British soldier never dreamt of defeat. Their Commander-in-chief, it is said, gazed just before the fight at the steep cliffs rising almost sheer above the shore, and exclaimed:

"Devils might get up here, but British soldiers never."

The French attack had already commenced when the order was given for ours to begin. The men had been formed into two lines, with cavalry on their flanks, some hours before and were greatly relieved when the order to advance was given.

To this day historians are sorely puzzled to account for the troops being dispatched in close formation instead of being widely extended in skirmishing order.

We can answer the question. The generals did not understand their business.

An extended line would have enabled the troops to swing round and envelope the Great Redoubt. But huddled together, we soon, owing to the rugged surface of the ground, got into disorder, melting into a confused mob, regiments mingling with regiments, brigades with brigades, long before the summit was reached.

When the mob in red arrived at the top they were so delighted, especially as it had all been done without orders from their officers, that they resolved on a fresh experiment.

So they gave the Russians a taste of what they could do in the fighting line minus commanders, by charging a dense column comprising several thousand men.

The Russians, never having fought us before were so surprised at the daring of charging in line, that they ran away.

Greatly elated, the leaderless soldiers stormed some intrenchments not far off and bayoneted all impudent enough to remain.

When the officers did intervene it was to order the retreat of the Light Infantry, who were gallantly holding a position they had won under a heavy fire. It was not necessary we should, and why the bugle was sounded is another of the mysteries of the Crimean War still awaiting solution.

Its effect was to precipitate the retreating force right into the centre of the Grenadiers who were coming to their assistance and so threw it into confusion.

Still no harm was done. The Grenadiers climbed the heights; the troops ordered to retreat crept after them and, aided by some Highland regiments who got to work on the flanks of the Russian columns, drove them back.

Lord Raglan seeing that matters were going in our favour pushed up another brigade, which, coming in contact with a Russian column hurrying to the assistance of comrades who were faring so badly at the hands of the Grenadiers and Highlanders, were assailed so fiercely that they fell back in great confusion.

When our men came in touch they formed up and with a great rush and much hurrahing carried the Great Redoubt. A galling fire from a couple of well-handled Russian guns forced us to retire, but we soon came again and the battle was won.

The French had not done so well. They had clung all the afternoon in isolated bodies to some positions on the slopes of the cliff. When the Russians retreated the French bounded gaily to the summit of the cliff in the belief that Alma had been won by them.

Truly a most extraordinary battle.

The Russians escaped with a loss of 5,700 killed and wounded, five Generals, and twenty-three Field Officers. That of the Allies was not so heavy. The French loss was sixty killed and 500 wounded, ours 362 killed and 1,400 wounded. In all with officers about 2,000.

After resting, the Allies resumed their march, the cavalry pushing on to Belbec, a small village eight miles from Sebastopol.

On the following day the allied armies took possession of some hills hard by. The fortifications already reared on the northern side of Sebastopol seemed so formidable

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Captain Nolan galloped after the men and frantically signalled.

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that Lord Raglan marched his army right across the country to the southern side in utter ignorance of the danger to which he was exposed from a flank attack.

But the Russians let the opportunity slip allowing the Allies on September 28th to take up a strong position in front of the port and town of Balaclava.

Even then a bold assault might have carried Sebastopol, but the wrangle which the proposition gave rise to between General Cathcart, General Burgoyne, Admiral Lyons, and Lord Raglan, was so prolonged that the council of war separated without a decision having been come to.

When an assault was seen to be hopeless the siege train was landed. Then commenced the most ridiculous siege of which history has any record. Indeed, for a long time it was not a siege at all for we could not obtain access to the harbour owing to the Russians having sunk some vessels at the entrance, and one side of the town was not invested at all, leaving the Russians free to come and go as they pleased.

The only portion of Sebastopol we could invest was less than four miles in extent, and, to crown all, the defending force was considerably larger than the investing, which is, of course, a reversal of the facts usually associated with sieges.

October 5th is the date of the celebrated battle of Balaclava. The charge of the British cavalry at this battle is acknowledged to be one of the most daring to be found in the annals of warfare. Rash as was the enterprise, its execution was somehow accompanied by much method. It may have been a folly, a sacrifice, the very madness of heroism, what you will, but it achieved the most momentous results.

The squadrons who dashed into, and fought their way out of the rain of death saved the town of Balaclava from being captured by the Russians.

Balaclava was necessary to us as the base from which we drew our supplies, and the Russians knowing its value made a bold bid for its capture. To resist the coming attack all we could muster was some 4,000 infantry, 1,200 cavalry and 40 guns. The Russians had massed for the enterprise over 40,000 men.

The battle commenced by an attack on the lines held by the Turkish forces. The French becoming alarmed at the increasing masses of Russians pouring out of Sebastopol sent the Ottoman troops some aid. For all this the Turks gave way the moment they were pressed, which led to Sir Colin Campbell pushing forward some regiments of Highlanders to stiffen their defence.

The moment the Turks retreated, the Russians swiftly pursued till they found their progress barred by the thin red line two deep. Against this thin red streak, which Sir Colin declared he did not think it necessary to reinforce, the Russians hurled their choicest troops, but in vain. The Russian horse galloped madly at the line a dozen times and every time retreated with scores of saddles empty, whilst an irate Scotch laird was railing at and beating the retiring Turks to the intense amusement of the Highlanders.

A message to Sebastopol had brought on to the hill a dense cloud of horse which at once descended into the valley. As they rode they came in touch with six squadrons of our Light Horse. The edge of the ridge above us was so thickly clustered with Muscovite horse that General Scarlett who had been sent by Lord Raglan to the assistance of the retreating Turks resolved to dislodge them. It was a hazardous thing to attempt, but General Scarlett knew the sort of men he had under him. Lord Lucan who rode up at the moment must also have had a high opinion of our cavalry for he approved of General Scarlett's decision.

Scarlett and his little band of 300 dashed up the green hill side, gave one great cheer, and then disappeared in the dense mass of Russian horse over 3,000 strong. To aid their comrades who were too hard at work emptying Russian saddles to cut their way back, some Dragoons and Royals charged the Russians in flank. A few minutes later the enemy were in full flight.

No one can accuse the Russian soldiers of cowardice. They are probably as brave a race as any in the world, and yet 3,000 of their picked horsemen were hustled and driven off the field by some 600 British troopers. Nothing, of course, came of this magnificent achievement. Had General Scarlett or Lord Cardigan known anything of war they would have followed up the retreating Russians. Had they done so their annihilation would have been certain.

Seeing that the retreat of the Russian horse provided an opportunity of recovering the heights which had been abandoned earlier in the day, Lord Raglan gave orders for the cavalry to advance. As Lord Lucan, misunderstanding the order, did nothing, Lord Raglan, to prevent the Russians from carrying off as trophies the British guns they had taken from the Turks, sent Captain Nolan with a note peremptorily ordering him to prevent the enemy from carrying off the guns.

"What guns, sir?" cried Lord Lucan.

Lord Raglan, of course, meant the guns the Russians had taken from the Turks, of which fact, it seems, Lord Lucan knew nothing. Nolan, instead of clearing up matters, exclaimed warmly:

"There is the enemy and there are the guns, my lord," and rode away.

Lord Lucan looked in the direction of the Russian cavalry and seeing a battery of guns in the valley behind which the Russian horse had reformed after their recent defeat, instructed Lord Cardigan to capture them.

Poor soldier as he was, Cardigan saw that to charge a battery a mile off protected by riflemen and other batteries on either flank meant destruction.

"I know it," said Lucan, "but Lord Raglan will have it so."

A moment later the trumpet sounded and the British cavalry rode into the valley of death. Captain Nolan galloped up after the men had started and frantically signalled that they were going the wrong way, but no one heeded.

The historic charge of Balaclava is so well known that there is no need to recapitulate it in these pages. Suffice it to say that under a tremendous cross fire they rode straight for the guns. A volley, when they got close, tore great gaps in their ranks, but our brave fellows held on, galloped past the guns and plunged right into the Russian cavalry in the rear.

The fight which followed should have ended in the complete destruction of the daring band, but thanks to the surprise of the Russians and a timely attack by the French Chasseurs d'Afrique against the Russian left enabled the few remaining troopers, not more than 220 unwounded men, to re-form and charge back with even more impetuosity.

It was lucky they did, for their momentum was so great that they literally rode over some Russians Lancers who had stolen round to the rear to cut them off.

"Hurrah!" they cried, "the road is clear."

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Our cavalry rode into the fatal valley 673 strong, and of these 163 were killed and 134 wounded.

The day after Balaclava the Russians made a most determined assault on the division under General de Lacy Evans. The attack was repulsed, but its delivery revealed such a weakness in our position at Mount Inkerman, the key of the allied position, that the Russians secretly massed a huge force of 40,000 men to attack us, the garrison at the same time making a sortie to engage the attention of the French. The Russian plan was bold and ably conceived. Had it succeeded, the French army would have been destroyed; for Inkerman taken, the huge Russian army would have had the French between two fires.

The ardour of the Russian troops having been inflamed by appeals to their faith and the dishonour of allowing invaders to occupy their soil, the force of the Russians on November 5th was hurled against the position occupied by us.

Favoured by the grey mist of the early morning, the enemy climbed the steep ascent and had driven in our outposts before we became aware of the danger. To prevent them from working round our rear the thin red line became so lengthened, that it was with the most difficulty our brave fellows kept it intact.

Again and again dense masses of grey-coated Russians were hurled against us. Regiment after regiment were hurried up and the most desperate efforts made to beat down our resistance by sheer weight of numbers, but with the dogged courage the British infantry have ever displayed in moments of supreme danger, they held to their position.

Our generals, it is true, hurried up troops as soon as the real object of the Russians became apparent, otherwise there was no attempt to defeat the enemy by well-devised counter-attacks.

In fact, Inkerman might be described as purely a soldier's battle.

When our lines were broken, which they often were by sheer weight of numbers, the troops without any orders from their officers, at once formed into a number of compact little bodies and pushed the Russians back to their old positions.

From first to last there was no manœuvring. Up and down the mountain, in glens and valleys, ridges and plateaux we fought the Russians with such determined courage that for all the vastness of their numbers they began to yield.

A combined movement or a charge of cavalry might have given us the victory sooner, but as the confusion was too great to permit of this we had to trust to the effect of a number of isolated victories. When the ammunition gave out we threw stones. When these in their turn were exhausted we invoked the bayonet.

The battle commenced at 5.45. a.m., and Tommy was still hard at work at eight in the evening. Shortly after the Russian attack collapsed, and by nine they were in full retreat.

As might be supposed from the fierceness of the fighting the death-roll was very great. Our forces at the commencement of the fight were 7,464 infantry and 200 cavalry. Yet this handful inflicted on the Russians a loss of 10,729 killed, wounded and missing. Our own casualties amounting to 597 killed and 1,760 wounded.

The Russians having realised that their troops were no match for the British in the open, now devoted their energies to strengthening the defences of Sebastopol. The elements, too, now ranged themselves on their side. The winter of 1854 was so terribly severe that disease soon made its appearance.

Without good food, warm clothing, and comfortable housing no troops could expect to withstand the hardships of a siege with the thermometer frequently at zero. The War Office knew perfectly well what would happen if the comforts of the men were not attended to, but their system was so antiquated and swathed in red tape that with its defects increased by the incapacity of the officials they nearly wiped out the British Army altogether. Whilst Whitehall was squabbling with the Horse Guards on questions of routine the soldiers were left without clothing and food.

During 1855 Sebastopol was bombarded five times, the guns of the French, which numbered over 200 pieces of large calibre, doing great damage. But we were not idle, for our gunners fired no fewer than 89,540 round shot and 12,723 bombs.

After we had stormed the Redan and taken the Malikoff the Russians blew up the remaining forts and evacuated the city.

Russia, now finding herself sorely crippled in the Baltic as well as the sea, asked for an armistice.

In March, 1856, peace was signed at Paris, to the joy of the nation, who were weary of the fearful blundering of the War Office, which in 1854 was so shocking that thousands of our best troops perished from want of food and clothing.

[Next Week: THE SCINDE WAR, 1842-43.]

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 4th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mrs. E. REES, 15 Airedale College Terrace, Undercliffe Lane, Bradford, Yorks.

Then Everybody Laughed.

SOME time since a counsel engaged in a case in which property of various descriptions was involved, made a long and rambling speech referring to each kind in turn. His monotonous delivery had sent nearly everyone to sleep, when he suddenly startled them all by abruptly changing his voice as he exclaimed to the judge:

"My lord, I will now address myself to the furniture!"

"You have been doing that for some time, I think, Mr. X," remarked the judge sweetly, amid universal tittering.

Now, there was another judge who had heard this anecdote, and was storing it up for use on some future occasion.

At last his opportunity seemed to have arrived. He was trying a case in which the circumstances were somewhat similar, but the property involved was live stock.

In due course, one of the counsel said:

"My lord, I will now address myself to the donkey."

"You have been doing that for some time," was the prompt response, whereupon a regular roar of laughter followed, which highly gratified the judge until its true reason dawned upon him.

E. R.

The Army from Within.

A CERTAIN Irish Militia regiment had to furnish the main guard in a large garrison. On the field-officer of the day visiting the guard, to his surprise he found no sentry on the post, and, wrathful at his discovery, entered the guard-room to ascertain the cause.

The guard-room was empty, with the exception of one Militiaman crouching over the glowing ashes of the fire, who turned on his seat and gazed at the irate field-officer with mingled curiosity and admiration.

The Field-Officer: "Where the dickens is the sentry?"

Militiaman: "The sentry, is it? Bedad, he's away beyant" (with a vague wave of a clay pipe) "kicking football."

Field-Officer: "Oh! Where's the guard?"

Militiaman: "The guard? Begor, they're kicking football, too."

Field-Officer: "Oh! Where's the sergeant of the guard?"

Militiaman: "The sargint? Never a know I knows, unless" (as a bright idea strikes him) "he's kicking football, too."

Field-Officer: "And who the dickens are you?"

Militiaman: "Me, is it? Begor! I'm the prisoner."

R. F.

Took Offence.

SOME time ago the play of *Hamlet* was performed at a provincial theatre.

In the scene with Polonius the crafty old courtier asks:

"Do you know me, my lord?"

And the Prince responds:

"Excellent well; you are a fishmonger?"

On hearing this, an old fishwoman stood up, and shaking her fist, shouted excitedly:

"Well, and s'posing he is? That's better than play-acting any day."

J. T.

Sharp Boy.

A BOARD schoolmaster had been giving his class a lesson in the mysteries of forming the degrees of comparison of the different adjectives.

He finished the lesson by making them repeat some of the things he had told them over again.

Amongst other questions he asked:

"Now, what is the superlative of the adjective 'nice'?"

A little lad instantly put up his hand to show that he knew the answer.

"Well, Harry," said the master, "what do you think is the superlative of nice?"

"Jam pudden!" promptly responded Harry.

D. J.

Any More?

A FRECKLE-FACED girl stopped at the post-office and yelled out:

"Anything for the Murphys?"

"No; there is not."

"Anything for Jane Murphy?"

"Nothing."

"Anything for Ann Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Tom Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Bob Murphy?"

"No."

"Anything for Terry Murphy?"

"No; nor Pat Murphy, nor Paul Murphy, nor Pete Murphy, nor Denis Murphy, nor for any Murphy—dead, living, unborn, native or foreign, civilised or uncivilised, savage or barbarous, male or female, black or white, franchised or disfranchised, convicted or otherwise. No; there is positively nothing for any of the Murphys, either individually, jointly, severally, now and for ever, one and inseparable."

The girl glanced at the postmaster in astonishment and said:

"Please to look if there is anything for Clarence Murphy."

C. F.

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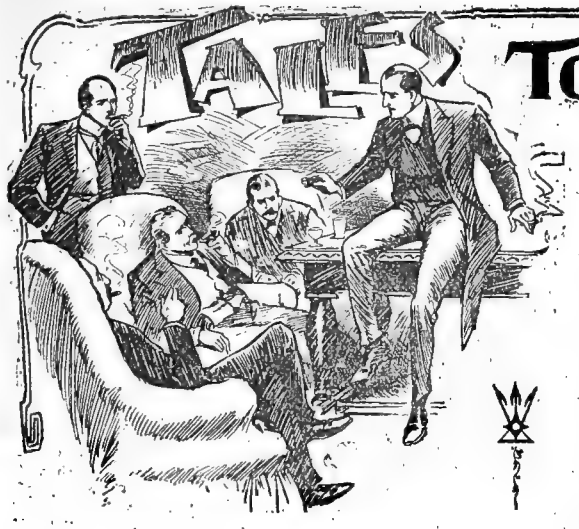

TOLD "OFF DUTY."

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas's Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career. Here is a story told by Inspector Nicholls, a detective of great reputation.]

A West End Mystery.

Told by INSPECTOR NICHOLLS.

I.

A Frightened Conscience.

THERE is nothing so remarkable as the way in which a clue will sometimes come to a detective in a most indirect manner, that will enable him to solve a mystery that otherwise would baffle all human skill. Perhaps there is not so much credit due to the detective who receives such aid, but I think the reader will allow that the alertness of mind and the faculty for putting remote and seemingly disconnected incidents together, and at a time and place far removed, deserve a fair share of commendation.

There are several cases I know of that would have remained unsolvable mysteries to this day, but for such fortunate accidents. One was the Allibone murder. I was enabled to solve it by one of these fortuitous circumstances, and as it happened a good many years ago, there will be no harm in giving the facts of the case here, though I shall not mention the right names because one branch of the family still figures prominently in the public eye.

I had been living in the Westminster Bridge Road for three weeks or more at a lodging house, the respectability of which was suspected. It was directly opposite a house the disrespectability of which was known, and it was this place and its inmates that I had under surveillance.

I was supposed to be a clerk out of employment, and I came and went at all hours. I was just setting out about two o'clock one afternoon to follow a character who had emerged from the opposite house, when one of the young chaps who occupied the next room to myself, and who seemed to live pretty well by doing nothing, came in in such a state of terror and collapse that I involuntarily offered him assistance as far as his room. We had met on the stairs.

It was not drink I could see at once, though to an inexperienced eye it might have seemed that the fellow was suffering from delerium tremens. He strode forth and back in the room, flinging out his arms for a time and then sinking into a chair and moaned.

"He's done it! He said he would, poisoned! O-o-o-grh-grh!"

An indescribable gurgle ended each exclamation.

"What is it? Has your mate shuffled off?"

I tried to pacify and obtain from him some idea of his trouble, but I could get no other expression from him, so I left him, and hurried out to see if my quarry had escaped me.

I was chagrined to find that he was not in sight, and I walked towards Westminster Bridge in anything but a pleasant mood.

There were some matters I had to report at the first opportunity at Scotland Yard so I made my way there.

A special edition of the afternoon papers were just out as I crossed the Bridge, and the boys were screaming out:

"Terrible sensation! West End murder!"

I bought a paper and was shocked to find an account of the murder of Richard Allibone, M.P. at his residence in Russell Square. I knew the man well and it was a painful surprise.

When I arrived at the Yard I learned from the chief the few facts that had been wired and telephoned in, and that Inspector Quaritch had been despatched to the scene.

As a personal friend of the popular M.P. I asked to be put on the case at once and the chief gave me the opportunity.

I hurried to the scene as fast as a cab could take me. On the way I thought of many things, but scarcely dwelt upon the murder and what I should find when I arrived. My mind did revert briefly to the unfortunate

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chap I had left in a bad way in my temporary lodging-house, but not to connect him in any way with this tragedy.

When I arrived at Allibone House I was ushered into the drawing-room and was cordially received by Richard Allibone!

"He's done it! He said he would. Poisoned! O-o-o-grh-grh!"

II.

Was It An Accident?

When I say that he greeted me cordially, I mean that he recognised me and gripped my hand tightly, though he said nothing.

His eyes shone with tears, and I knew he could not then trust himself to speak.

He walked away, and presently came back again and pointing to the next room, the door of which was closed, he burst out:

"Great Heavens! Nicholls, my poor child lies in that room dead! My only child, my all, my beautiful girl!"

He wrung my hand again, and though his voice quavered, he manfully restrained himself from giving way to his grief. I tried to comfort him as best I could.

As I entered the room, the Inspector nodded to me. He was sitting at one end of a little table in the centre of the room. On one side the servants were ranged, five in all, and on the other side, seated at a writing-table was a young man who seemed indifferent to all that was taking place.

It was Henry Carrewe, the nephew of Mr. Allibone, and his private secretary. I had never met him, and I found myself glancing at him furtively several times, and I remember distinctly the sub-conscious dislike that I at once formed for him.

That Mr. Allibone had been reported as murdered was due to the excitability of the servants. The butler, unable to get the family physician on the telephone, had called the footman and sent him out to fetch the nearest doctor, instead of which he had gone to the nearest station and reported that his master had been killed. A police-officer was at once sent to Russell Square, and the report was sent in to Scotland Yard. This had been corrected since I left the chief.

Mr. Allibone regretted the presence of police. It was not a case which demanded them. He explained to me that it was all an accident. Had the physician arrived before any word had reached the police, it is terrible to think—in the light of after events—how different would have been the ending.

When the Inspector arrived he found the girl dead, and a physician did not arrive until a few minutes later. There was clearly nothing for him to do but investigate the case.

Quaritch was a careful man, and it is to this partly that I owe my success on the case. If he had hurried and bungled the job he would have had it all over before I arrived.

After Mr. Allibone had explained to me the nature of the accident, the servants having been examined, Inspector Quaritch called upon Mr. Allibone for an explanation, which he seemed disposed to make now.

"Mr Carrewe here is my secretary," he began. "We began work this morning as usual. I was dictating and as is customary, I was walking up and down the room. I had stopped a moment to pour myself out a glass of water and drink, when suddenly my daughter, burst into the room, screaming, 'father, father, don't!'—

"I am at a loss to say what it was she tried to warn me not to do, but at that instant she caught her foot upon the hassock, stumbled and fell heavily on the floor.

"I stooped to raise her. I had been alarmed at the terror that was depicted upon her face. It was awful. What was my grief to find that she was unconscious.

"Violent as the fall had been, I did not think it could have been fatal. I thought she had fainted. I took the glass of water from which I had drunk and dashed it in her face. She opened her eyes for an instant, whispered, 'father, father,' and fell back dead.

"I did not then believe it though, and continued to moisten her face with water from the pitcher, and sent the butler for a physician. Dr. Pardyce and Dr. Hale arrived as you know some few minutes after you."

At this moment the door of the next room opened, and the two physicians entered. Mr. Allibone turned to them eagerly. They shook their heads.

"We have done all we can," said Dr. Hale, "there is no hope. There are symptoms of poisoning, though they are obscure and rare. An autopsy."

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Allibone. "It cannot be.

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How can she be poisoned? Spare me that. My beautiful girl. Dead! Dead!"

He buried his face in his hands and wept with that grief of the aged who, in bereavement such as this, have no hope save in death and the reunion that shall follow it.

It was discovered now that Miss Allibone's maid was missing, that she had not been examined. This was suspicious and significant, and the butler was sent at once in search of her.

III.

What the Maid Saw.

The butler returned presently supporting the maid, who seemed to be in a state of collapse, weeping hysterically. She had been hiding in a closet in her mistress' room, and being neither mentally nor physically strong, the tragedy had driven her to the verge of insanity.

She gave a piece of evidence, however, that sent everyone present into consternation.

"I saw him do it—I saw him do it," she wailed, her face buried in her hands and a handkerchief.

I went over to the maid and took her out of the butler's care; sat her down and talked gently and soothingly to her. I soon got her to look at me and she gained confidence, and stopped weeping somewhat, though she was still shaken with convulsive sobs.

"Saw him do what?" I asked.

"Put it in the water—it was poison—I told Miss Allibone—she tried—to warn her father—now she's d-e-a-d!"

She broke off into a despairing wail as the thought came to her that her mistress was dead.

"How did it occur?" I urged. "When did you see this? Who did it?"

The last question seemed to nerve her. She took her hands from her face and leapt to her feet.

"He!" she screamed, pointing an accusing finger at Mr. Carrewe.

He must have been a clever scoundrel in a way, for he never turned a hair.

"Oh, I say, uncle, this won't do," he said rising, and addressing Mr. Allibone. "The girl has gone daft."

"Certainly, this is too absurd," exclaimed Mr. Allibone. "Take the girl away——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Allibone," I interrupted, "we must hear what the girl has to say."

I stood beside her now, supporting her with an arm about her waist.

"Try and tell us what you know from the beginning," I asked her quietly.

"I was in there," pointing to the door of an adjoining apartment, "I happened to look in the mirror and could see Mr. Carrewe in here. His face was terrible, pale and frightened, and he looked around the room as though afraid someone was watching him.

"Then I saw him put something from a bottle in the glass jug of drinking water. I should not have thought anything of this if he had not looked so scared.

"Mistress had gone out for her morning constitutional, and I was dreadfully worried till she came back. I wanted to tell her what I had seen. When I heard the front door close and knew she had returned, I rose and would have rushed to her, but I could not keep my feet, and I fell in a faint. She found me so in her room, and as soon as I was brought to, I told her. She screamed and ran downstairs to warn her father, you know what happened then."

The telling of her story had quieted her nerves somewhat.

She stared at the man she accused.

"This evidence will necessitate your being searched, Mr. Carrewe," said Inspector Quaritch. "Mr. Nicholls, will you perform the duty?"

"He!" she screamed, pointing an accusing finger at Mr. Carrewe.

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I deposited the maid in the chair and stepped forward.

"But that is all rubbish," interposed Mr. Allibone. "I have drunk of the water and it is quite harmless. The girl must be under a delusion."

"Never mind, uncle," said Mr. Carrewe, "let them proceed with the search. What's more I'll have some of this poisoned water myself."

He filled a glass and drank it off and a part of another glass.

Some of the servants present no doubt expected him to drop dead where he stood. But he only smiled grimly, and allowed me to proceed with the search.

It came to me while doing this that there was a mystery here that would baffle all solution so slender were the clues, and then there occurred, like a flash, the memory of that pitiable frightened creature I had left in his room in Westminster Bridge Road.

"Do you happen to know a Mr. Pollidge?" I asked casually, as I had about finished the search.

"Never heard the name," he replied.

But I had fixed my eye upon him too attentively, and I detected a quiver of the eyelid and the faintest change of expression which would have been invisible had I stood five yards from him, and they aroused my suspicions.

I informed Inspector Quaritch in a few whispered words of the conclusions I had formed.

He did not think there was any basis for them, but as I seemed convinced, and there was a bare possibility of turning up a valuable bit of evidence, he agreed that I should go and fetch this man while he finished the examination of those present.

Little did I dream of the tragic *dénouement* that was to follow. I don't know that I deserve any special credit for this, but if it had not been for my meeting that frightened man in the house I was about to leave earlier in the day, it is safe to say that this West End Mystery would very likely have remained one of the unsolved crimes of this great city.

Within the hour I was back again in a cab with my man beside me. I had no difficulty in getting him to come with me, but when he saw we were in Russell Square he became excitable, and when we stopped in front of Mr. Allibone's house he was unmanageable, and I had to get assistance to force him into the house. His actions confirmed my suspicions. When he was led into the room and his eyes fell on Mr. Carrewe he was all of a tremble.

"That's him," he cried, "he said he'd do it!"

Mr. Carrewe never winced despite this direct charge.

"Why do you bring this man here? I never saw him before," he said.

"It's a lie," exclaimed the new witness. "Ask him," pointing to Mr. Allibone, "if he knows me."

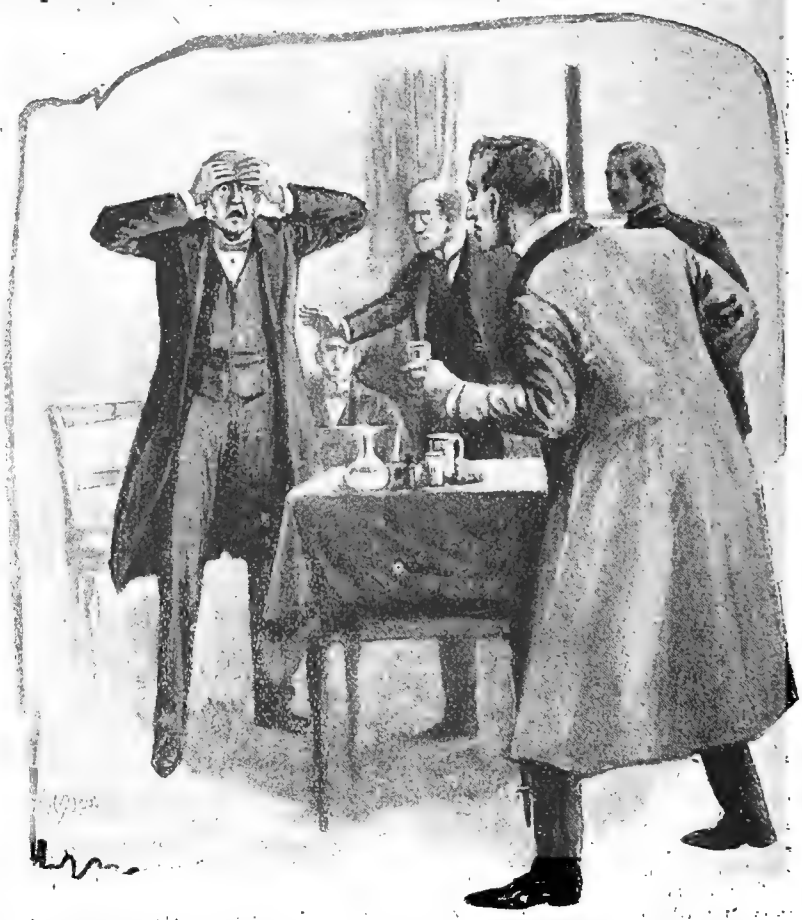
Mr. Allibone reluctantly confessed that he had submitted to a systematic blackmailing by this man for the past year, but he added that that did not imply that his nephew knew the wretch.

"Don't it!" cried the weak creature. "He put me up to it. He took half the rhino, and last night he told me he was going to finish you; that there was more in you dead than alive!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. Allibone.

There was nothing at all impossible in it to me, and I went to the fireplace and began raking among the ash.

"The evidence, however, is sufficient to warrant the arrest of Mr. Carrewe," said Inspector Quaritch, dismissing all the servants.



Mr. Allibone was staring as though his eyes would start from their sockets.

Raking at the coals in the fire I probed out some bits of ash that were welded together with what looked very much like glass. Next I found the neck of the bottle with the glass stopper still in it; as it was still hot, I arose and directed the attention of Mr. Allibone, Mr. Carrewe and the Inspector to what I had discovered.

When it had cooled somewhat, I picked it up with my handkerchief. It was a peculiar bottle of foreign make. I had the butler called again and sent him for a special drug at the chemist's. Then I took what remained of the water in the jug and glass.

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"I have made a considerable study of poisons," I explained. "I will tell you in a few minutes whether this water is poisoned and what it contains."

The man Carrewe still maintained a stolid indifference. On Mr. Allibone, however, the scene was telling terribly. His face was becoming haggard.

"Henry, Henry, say something," he pleaded. "Henry deny all this."

He sank into a chair, helpless.

The butler returned with the drug he had purchased for me, and I prepared for the experiment I was about to make.

I kept to the far side of the table for I could see that although Mr. Carrewe controlled himself admirably, there was a gleam in his eye as though he would have liked to leap upon me and spill that water, which if it contained the poison I thought it did, would prove such damning evidence against him.

The family physician, Dr. Hale, who was present, and had taken but slight part in the proceedings save to answer such questions as were put to him, now showed the greatest interest in what I was about to do.

I called for a little fresh water and a glass.

"I will take first this water which has just been brought to me," I said, "and dropping some of this fluid into it will assure you that it will remain unchanged in colour."

Sixty minims had fallen into the water and it remained unaltered.

"I will take a glass half-full from this pitcher. I must tell you," I explained slowly, "what I expect, and it will serve as an added proof if I am correct. This bottle stopper I recognise as part of a bottle in which very rare and deadly drugs are sometimes put in India. You will see almost its counterpart at the British Museum. There is a deadly drug the natives obtain from a species of adder. It can be administered internally and it takes from a month to six months to bring about death, but there is no tracing the cause. If, however, it gets into the blood or touches an open wound it brings death almost instantaneously by paralysing the heart.

"Thus a man could drink great quantities of this safely enough, for he could a few hours afterwards or next day apply an antidote." Here I looked steadily at Mr. Carrewe.

"You said, I believe," I remarked to Dr. Hale, "that there was a slight abrasion beside the ear, sustained most likely by Miss Allibone in falling? Just so. You see the water that was dashed on her face would have allowed this poison to get into her blood."

I was exasperatingly deliberate, I know, but I felt very sure of my point. I uncorked the little phial and held it over the glass that was half-full of water from the pitcher. Mr. Allibone leant forward in his chair.

"If I am right in my surmise the fluid I am about to drop in will turn this water a pale violet," I said.

And then one, two, three, I began to drop it in minims into the glass. Twenty had fallen and no change had come and I could see a leer of malice and triumph in the eyes of Mr. Carrewe. Then twenty-one, twenty-two—I was not at all daunted. I knew that according to the quantity of the poison placed in the water, it would require just so many minims to bring about the change.

At the twenty-fourth drop the water changed almost instantly to a pale purple as I had predicted. I glanced hastily at each face present.

Then a cry of anguish rang out that brought me to my feet like lightning.

"Heavens, Nicholls, what have you done?" Mr. Allibone was staring as though his eyes would start from their sockets. "You make me my child's murderer. It was I—who dashed that water in her face! My girl—my—poor—girl—I—I—" his hand went to his throat, before any one could catch him he was lying in a heap upon the floor.

Dr. Hale did all he could for him on the instant, but it was little that could be done for the poor old man, heart-broken and conscience-stricken as he was.

He lingered a month and died, recovering consciousness for just sufficient length of time to make a new will and destroy the old one in which his nephew had been remembered to the tune of one hundred thousand pounds.

I had the satisfaction of taking Mr. Henry Carrewe into custody there and then, and putting him in safe keeping. Clever as he undoubtedly was in crooked work, he was not clever enough to choose equally clever men to carry out his dirty work.

At the trial Mr. Pollidge, his tool, showed that the nephew had deliberately led his uncle into compromising situations and then levied a heavy blackmail by means of Mr. Pollidge. This had been enough for a time, but so easy is it to fall into evil ways, after the first few steps, that the knowledge that a hundred thousand pounds awaited him when his uncle died, aroused in him no sense of gratitude, but only the fiendish desire to help him shuffle off this mortal coil.

He went up for life for it, and few cases have given me so much satisfaction as this, for I know that the man is still expiating his crimes at the hardest kind of labour in Portland Prison.

I took up my work of tracing the rogues whom I had been watching in the house in Westminster Bridge Road, and was soon rewarded with an adventure, which if not so tragic was very exciting, but that of course is another story.

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The Lost Rose.

With many wild whoops, much leaping and tumbling, the children hurried out of the weather-beaten schoolhouse and took their several ways toward their homes in the sparsely-settled neighbourhood.

A moment later Millie Forrest, the teacher, came out and hurrying across the playground turned into the long lane, flanked by "stake and rider" fences, overrun here and there with wild morning-glory vines.

Small, slender, with big brown eyes, an oval face with irregular features, the young "teacher" was not what one would call pretty, but there was a piquant arch to the red lips, and the heavy mass of nut-brown hair that overhung her brows was a glory in itself sufficient to have awakened envy.

She walked rapidly along the lane and turned through a gate into a grove of trees on the rise. Following a winding path crossed by deep shadows cast from the trees by the declining sun, she was halfway through the wood when Edgar Sommers, a neighbour's son, came from a clump of bushes and, with a show of bashfulness, joined her.

"Evening, Millie," he said, after an embarrassing silence. "Had a good day at school?"

"Much the same as all other days," replied the girl with a defiant lifting of her head. "I am tired of it all. I wonder if everyone finds life such a dreary round? Sometimes I wish I might fall into the old mill-pond yonder with no one near to rescue me."

The young man's eyes grew moist and his lip trembled perceptibly.

"Is it so dull and stupid for you here, Millie?" he said slowly. "I—I wish I might do something to make things brighter and—sweeter for you."

The girl turned her face away that he might not see the sudden light that came into her eyes and the flush that coloured her brown cheek.

"I'm rough and awkward," he continued, lengthening his stride to keep up with the girl's quickening pace, "not worthy of you in any way; Millie, Millie—I love you, love you more than my life, more than a thousand lives. If you would only give me the right, I would do as much as any man could do to make you happy."

She was going forward rapidly, nervously, her head lifted, and a look of gladness in her eyes.

Had he seen it he would have taken her in his arms, then and there, and settled the question. But he did not see it and her silence was like death to his hopes.

A wild rose nodding and blushing beside the patch caught his eye, and stooping, he plucked it from the bush.

"See, Millie, the last of the season; let the flower plead for me. I won't ask you to decide now, but you are going to the dance over at Major Barlow's to-night. If you think you could trust me and let me love and care for you, wear it in your hair."

He held out the rose to her and she took it demurely from his big, brown fingers.

"If you wear the flower to-night, you will make me the happiest man in the world," he said in a half-whisper. "If you don't, you will break my heart."

He stood for a moment gazing with longing eyes upon the slender figure of the girl going on, with the warm sunlight turning her bronze hair to gold. Then he went back heavily along the path and passed through the meadow lands lying beyond the grove and by the old water-mill in the ravine.

As he passed the mill he saw Frisbie, the new miller from the city, standing in the door, his curling hair white with flour dust.

Edgar could not but acknowledge him a handsome fellow, and remembering how often he had been a visitor at the Forrest home since he came to the neighbourhood, he answered the miller's hearty greeting gruffly and passed on.

Millie went through the woods softly humming:

"Give me a kiss, that going home,
My feet may walk on air."

She dressed herself with unusual care for the evening and when she was ready put the wild rose in her hair. The dance was to be only a neighbourly party, and she would go over early and be with the Barlow girls when the others came.

As she tripped into the little sitting room she met her mother going with the pitcher for water. Millie took the vessel from her mother and ran lightly down the slope. Stooping she dipped the pitcher into the spring. In the dusk the clear, undisturbed waters shone like silver. As she lifted the full pitcher and turned to retrace her steps the rose slipped from her hair and falling into the spring brook was carried swiftly out of sight. The happy girl did not miss the pretty token until well on her way to Major Barlow's.

It was too late then to go back to look for it and she went on framing many pretty excuses for not having

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the rose in her hair to be seen when Edgar should come.

It was nearly nine o'clock and the full moon was shining when Edgar Sommers, on his way to the dance, reached the narrow foot-bridge that crossed the spring brook. He was anxious and despondent. His great love made him timid and cast a halo about the object of his affection. It seemed impossible that she should care for him. He stood for a moment on the bridge looking down into the moonlit water.

A bright object dancing on the ripples caught his eye. It whirled over the tiny rapids and lodged against the roots of a willow. Edgar sprang over the low rail of the bridge and snatched from the water the rose he had given Millie a few hours before. Here, then, was her answer to his pleading.

She had thrown it away, and the spring brook brought it to save him the humiliation of meeting a more direct refusal from her lips.

He was dumb with the sudden overthrow of his hopes and walked on aimlessly, the rose crushed in his hand.

Suddenly the strain of a violin playing the "Blue Danube" fell on his ears. He had come unconsciously to where she was.

He would have turned back, but could not. A desire to look upon her face once more before he went away forever drew him on until he stood in the shadow of a vine that ran over the doorway of the Barlow home.

The door was open and he saw the gay couples floating about the big dining-room. Millie was dancing with the new miller, and they glided on to the rise and fall of the music, the handsomest couple in the room. How Edgar hated the man! He longed to stretch out his hand, take the white throat of his rival between his strong fingers and crush out his life. It was for this unknown, smooth-voiced stranger that she had thrown him over.

But she did not love him, so what matter who claimed her. He turned away and was soon hidden in the shadow of the woods that skirted the stream below the house.

Millie waited impatiently for Edgar's coming. She had determined to go to him as soon as he arrived and tell him of the loss of the rose and acknowledge her intention to have worn it.

He would forgive her seeming carelessness when he knew she loved him; she felt sure of that.

But as the hours wore on and he did not come, she became restive and frightened. What could have happened to detain him.

At last the people prepared to go home and the miller offered to escort her across the fields. She would have refused him, but there was no good excuse. There was no one else to accompany her, and so the two went out across the meadows. He gay and confident, she sad and apprehensive. As they were going over the rustic bridge where Edgar had found the rose, the young man suddenly threw his arm about Millie's waist, and, drawing her close, cried: "Toll, little one, that is the country custom, isn't it? Come, give me a kiss for toll."

"Let me go," she cried, and struggled to free herself.

"Not until I have taken toll," he replied, bending over her. "It is my right, you know."

Before the now frightened girl could cry out there was a quick step on the bridge, and a big, brown hand fell on the shoulder of the young miller, and he turned to face the tall young farmer. The girl ran to the end of the bridge and stood trembling with fright.

The two men faced each other on the narrow bridge. The moon, far down in the west, cast a mellow light on the scene.

Edgar was the first to speak, and his voice had in it the ring of steel.

"Millie," said he, "has this—fellow the right to offer to kiss you?"

"You know he hasn't." She stood straight now, and her brown eyes flashed, then her manner suddenly changed. "Don't strike him, Edgar. Let him go. You are to blame. If you had come as you promised this would not have happened."

"And the rose," he said, "I found it here in the brook."

"It was in my hair when I left home. Oh, Edgar, I understand; you—you thought I threw it away."

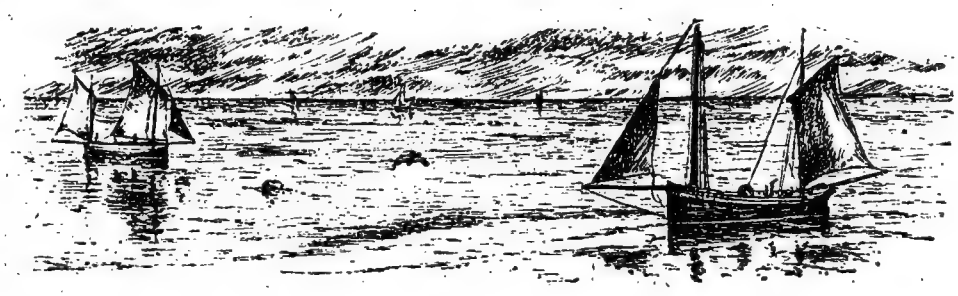
She was close by his side now.

"And you didn't?"

"I would have sacrificed my life first."

"Thank Heaven."

And when they looked again they were alone.



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LANGLEY'S BURGLAR.

HE was a clean, venerable-looking old fellow, with a snowy white tuft of hair on his chin and a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles astride of a nose that was coloured just a trifle deeper than the rest of his face. His expression was mild and benevolent. A folded rule was sticking out of his waistcoat pocket, and a thick, stubby pencil protruded from his ear, and he carried a hammer.

"Good-morning, marm," he said, as Mrs. Langley opened the kitchen door. "I'm the carpenter."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Langley, vaguely.

"The agent sent me to look at the windows and see what was wanted for them," pursued the old man.

"Not our windows, surely," said Mrs. Langley. "There's nothing in the world the matter with them. There must be some mistake."

"It's the casings I want to look at," explained the carpenter. "I want to see whether the weather stripping is set tight or if it wants new anywhere. We're going to have a cold winter, once it starts, and we don't want to have you freezing to death."

He looked so particularly benevolent as he said this that Mrs. Langley felt quite grateful. She invited him in and he inspected the kitchen windows, the bedroom and parlour windows, and even the transoms. He did everything in a very conscientious, painstaking fashion, and it was nearly half-an-hour before he folded up his rule and took up his hat to go.

"There ain't really much to do," he said, with a modest air of deprecating his efforts in Mrs. Langley's behalf in order to stem an anticipated flood of thanks. "I suppose there's about an hour's work altogether. That there door is sprung badly, and I might as well put that right with the rest. Let the tail go with the hide—hat's what I say. There's no use spoiling the ship to save a pot of pitch. He didn't tell me to put the door right, but I ain't a man who likes to do things by halves."

Mrs. Langley commended these statements.

"Now, marm, if you'll let me know what day to come I'll fix it so's I won't have to bother you when it's not convenient," concluded the old man. "I don't like to come in with my tools messing up a house when a lady ain't expectin' me. How'm I goin' to know but she's got company, or something of that sort?"

Mrs. Langley said he was the most considerate man she ever saw.

Langley was suspicious from the start.

"Told you the agent sent him round, did he?" he asked. "That does settle it! The agent! Sent a carpenter round! Unsolicited—actuated by a kind concern for our comfort! I didn't go down on my knees half-a-dozen times to implore him to have those windows altered. I didn't finally take a big stick and go round to his office and make threatening demonstrations. No, he thought some of us might sit in a draught and catch cold, so he sent a man to do the work. That's the worst I ever heard."

"Sounds rather fishy," said Plummer, who was over for the evening.

"What would the man want to come round for if he wasn't sent?" asked Mrs. Langley. "He said the agent sent him, most distinctly and positively. He wouldn't say a thing like that and go to all that trouble unless it was so."

"What have you missed since he went away?" asked Plummer.

"What have I——? Why you don't mean——? No, that would be absurd. He couldn't have taken anything without my seeing him. I was with him the whole time. Besides, he wasn't at all that kind of a man."

"Do you mean that he didn't look like a burglar? That don't signify anything."

"I think I can tell a burglar when I see one," said Mrs. Langley, indignantly. "This man was as nice and pleasant and chatty as he could be."

"Some of the most confirmed and inveterate burglars I have known have been pleasant, chatty men," remarked Langley.

"'When the enterprising burglar's not a-burgling he loves to lie a-basking in the sun,'" quoted Plummer.

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"Did he wipe his feet on the mat when he came in?" inquired Langley.

"I think you are both of you absurd," said his wife. "If he had been a burglar why wouldn't he have stolen something while he was in the house? Another thing, he wouldn't have spoken about the broken fastening on the pantry window and said he would bring a new one."

"That's easily explained," remarked Langley. "He probably thought there was a chance that we would put on a new fastening ourselves if he didn't say that he would. He wanted to make sure of an opening."

"An opening for a person of experience," added Plummer.

"That's the idea exactly, I think we can make up our minds that we are going to have what they call a nocturnal visitor. I distrust these philanthropic persons with silvery whiskers."

"Were there any valuables in sight, Mrs. Langley?" asked Plummer.

"There was my watch on the dressing-table and my bracelet and things, and there was baby's little silver mug and the cream jug and the rest of the things on the sideboard. I couldn't go round and gather up everything before I brought him in. I wouldn't have let him in at all if I hadn't known he was all right."

"How did you come to know he was all right?" asked Langley.

"Because I did," answered his wife, conclusively.

Langley, however, refused to be convinced. He felt rather nervous about leaving his wife alone the next morning, and borrowed Plummer's little 22-calibre revolver, which he wanted her to carry in her pocket.

His own pistol was a wide-muzzled, stubby affair, that held flat, squat cartridges calculated to stop an elephant in his rush.

Mrs. Langley said she thought she would manage to get along without any of those horrible things.

Later in the day Langley was inspired by the recollection that he paid taxes and was entitled to police protection. He thereupon called at the neighbouring police-station and informed the inspector of his fears.

That functionary seemed to take the same view of the matter as Langley did. He said he thought he recognised the description of the self-styled carpenter, whom he believed to be the leader of a dangerous gang. He assured Langley that he would have the house watched.

When Langley returned home that evening he saw a man strolling along on the side of the street and looking so supernaturally unconcerned and casual that anybody would have known he was a plain-clothes man on guard. This gave Langley a certain sense of security, but at the same time rendered him decidedly nervous. Plummer did not come round or Langley would have asked him to stay all night.

Langley told his wife what the police inspector had said. He was unwilling to alarm her, but he felt that what he called her "cock-sureness" needed some rebuke For some reason, however, she did not seem to be impressed, and she laughed at him in a particularly aggravating way when he balanced a tea tray and a couple of flat irons against the pantry window.

It was about midnight when the trap was sprung. It went off with a crash, clatter and bang that made Langley sit bolt upright in bed, with his heart beating like a steam-hammer, before he quite realised what had happened. There was an instant of awful and profound stillness. Then Langley heard his wife's voice. She said:

"I thought that would happen. The cat has knocked down that arrangement of yours, William."

Langley deigned no reply, but lifted himself cautiously out of bed, and, groping for his revolver, found it and stole softly and fearfully down the noisily creaking stairs.

He reached the pantry at last and found his tray and flat irons on the floor. A cold current of air that instantly communicated its chill to his spinal column told him that the window was open. Slowly and cautiously he peered out.

A subdued cough came from the back yard, and Langley drew his head back with a suddenness that brought it into violent contact with one of the pantry shelves. He felt the bump later, but hardly noticed the shock at the time.

Reproaching himself for cowardice, he nerved himself for the effort, and, again looking out of the window, he called:

"Who's there?" the pulsations in his throat imparting a tremor to his voice.

"We're police-officers," came the reply, and two shadowy forms loomed up from the darkness. "Sorry we disturbed you, but we were trying the windows and knocked something over."

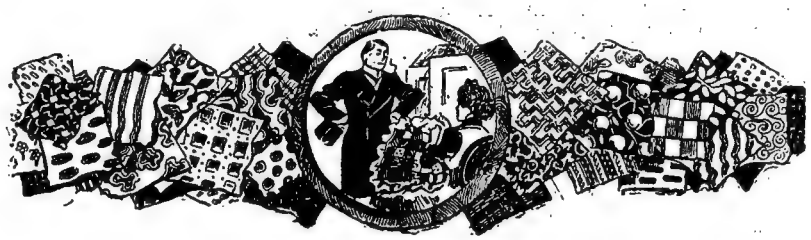
"I believe you did," said Langley bitterly.

"It wasn't anybody," said Langley returning to his room.

"What is it?" asked his wife, sleepily. "I wish you'd go to bed and stop prowling round, William. Of course there wasn't anybody. I knew that perfectly well."

"I'd like to know how you knew it," said Langley, cowering beneath the bedclothes and shivering.

"I'd have told you before if you hadn't been so smart about it," replied Mrs Langley. "I went round to the agent's this afternoon and he said he had sent the man round. He was just as nice—. Why William Langley, I'd be ashamed."



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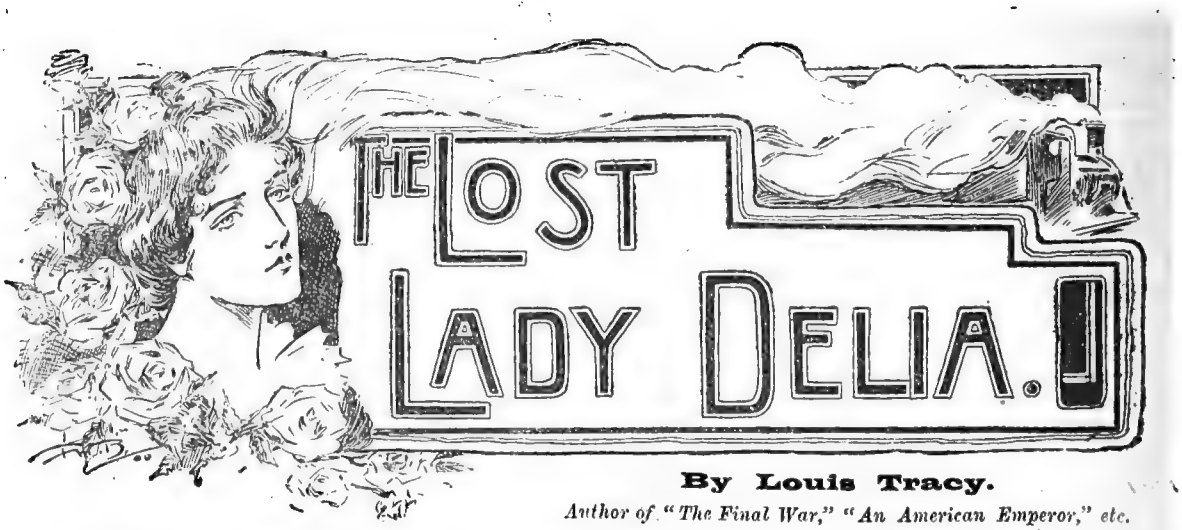

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

THIS TELLS THE STORY FROM THE START.

LADY DELIA LYLE leaves her house one foggy November afternoon saying she is going to see her sister at Richmond, but from that time she is not heard of.

Her husband, Sir Charles Lyle, puts the matter into the hands of detectives, Inspector Winter taking charge of the case.

Reginald Brett, a barrister friend of the Lyles, also promises to do all he can, and he finds out that Lady Delia, on the night of her disappearance, instead of going to Richmond, alighted at Sloane Square, and went to a block of flats called Raleigh Mansions.

Towards the end of the month the body of a woman, evidently murdered, is found wedged beneath a drain-pipe in the Thames at Putney, and, though Sir Charles does not identify the body, Brett imagines it to be that of Lady Delia. Shortly after this discovery Lady Delia's maid, Jane Harding, disappears. She is afterwards found to have gone on the stage.

Brett now starts investigations at Raleigh Mansions, and he fixes on two residents there as being likely to have been connected with Lady Delia. These are a Mr. Sydney H. Pyne, who is not at present in residence, and a Mrs. Hilmer, whom he finds to be Pyne's sister.

It had transpired that Pyne had gone to Monte Carlo, and thither Brett goes, and he discovers that though letters are addressed to Pyne at the Hotel du Cercle, he is not known there.

During his stay at Monte Carlo Brett becomes acquainted with an Englishman, named Albert Mensmore, whom he helps out of some money difficulties, but he does not discover anything about Pyne.

After his return Brett finds out that Sir Charles Lyle knows Albert Mensmore, but in what connection does not transpire.

A few days later Brett goes into the City, to the office of Dodge and Co., with whom he had had some speculative dealings, and from remarks made by Mr. Dodge, he thinks that Pyne and Mensmore must be one and the same man. In the evening Brett and Winter go to Raleigh Mansions and search the flat occupied by Pyne. Brett finds that a piece of one of the fire-dogs is missing, and that it exactly corresponds with the piece of iron which was found imbedded in the head of the body found at Putney.

It is shown by this time that Mensmore (who is at Genoa) had previously adopted the name of Pyne. The real Pyne (his mining partner) writes him that their property is likely to bring them much wealth.

Pyne arrives in England and takes Mensmore's flat, where the detectives surprise him. Brett partially explains the situation, and has a talk with Pyne.

CHAPTER XXII. *(continued).*

"OH, just that Mensmore had acted for me. The man seemed a bit puzzled, but he didn't kick when I offered to pay up the rent owing since Christmas, and another quarter in advance."

"I don't suppose he did. The rent was due, then?"

"Yes. It seems that Mensmore, writing in my name, sent a letter from Monte Carlo a month ago saying he would return about this time and settle up."

"Thus proving his intention all along to come back to London. It is a queer muddle, Mr. Pyne, is it not?"

"Very, but you will pardon me as an outsider saying one thing—you all appear to have overlooked a clear trail."

"And what is that?"

"What about Mrs. Hilmer? Who is she? Who are her friends? Who maintains her in such style? Bertie was with me four years and never mentioned her. She could not have been rich by inheritance, as it was on account of their father going broke that Mensmore had to leave the Army and come out to the States. It strikes me, Mr. Brett, that the woman knows more about this affair than the man."

"You may be right. But do not forget the absolute proofs we possess that the crime occurred in Mensmore's chambers, and the extraordinary coincidence that he left England immediately afterwards."

"I am not forgetting anything. These facts tell both ways. Just because he quitted the country at the time somebody may have tried to throw the blame on him."

The theory was plausible, though Brett could not accept it. Nevertheless, after Pyne had taken his departure he could not help thinking about his references to Mrs. Hilmer. That there was force in them he could not deny, and with the admission came the unpleasant thought that perhaps he, Brett, was in some sense responsible for the neglect to clear up her antecedents.

However, a few hours might explain much.

With unwonted impatience the barrister awaited the coming of night. He tried every expedient to kill time, and found each operation tedious.

He dined early, and as half-past seven came and passed he wondered why the detective did not appear.

But his doubts on this point did not last long.

"Winter has gone to Charing Cross to make sure of their arrival," he said to himself.

At ten minutes to eight the detective came in hurriedly to say: "They will be here directly. A servant has taken their luggage to Mrs. Hilmer's place, and they are evidently driving straight here after taking some refreshment at the station."

"Have you no faith in human nature, Mr. Winter? Could you not trust their words?"

"Well, sir, my experience of human nature is that you can very seldom trust anybody's word."

At last Smith announced "Mrs. Hilmer and Mr. Mensmore."

When they entered Brett was for the moment at a loss to know exactly how to receive them.

But Mrs. Hilmer settled the matter by coming with a quiet "Good evening," and seating herself, and Mensmore stood near the door, very pale and stern-looking.

"It appears, Mr. Brett," he said, "that we met in Monte Carlo under false pretences. You were, it seems, a detective

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on the track of a murderer, and you were good enough to believe that I was the person you sought. It would have saved some misconception on my part had you explained our *rôles* earlier. However, I am here to meet the charge."

Reggie was not unprepared for this attitude on Mensmore's part. But he was determined that it should not continue if he could help it.

"When we parted at Monte Carlo, Mensmore," he said, "we parted as friends."

"Yes."

"Then tell me what has happened since to cause this obvious change in your opinion of me."

"Is it not true that you suspect me of murdering Lady Delia Lyle?"

"No."

"But why has my sister been told that I ran serious risk of being apprehended on that count?"

"Because we certainly did suspect a mysterious personage who called himself Sydney H. Pyne, and whose behaviour was so unaccountable that the authorities required a reasonable explanation of it."

"Do I understand, Brett, that we meet with no more suspicion between us than when we last saw each other?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I ask your pardon for my manner and my words. I have suffered keenly during the last three days from this cruel thought. Let us shake hands on it."

As their hands met they both heard Mrs. Hilmer stifle a sob. Mensmore turned to her.

"Now, Gwen," he said, "don't be foolish. We will soon clear up this miserable business. So far as we are concerned all we need do is to tell the truth and fear nobody."

"That's it," said Winter. "If you adopt that course the matter will soon be ended."

Mensmore turned to the speaker. He guessed his identity, but Brett introduced the detective by name.

"Well," said Mensmore, "I have come here to answer questions. What is it you want to know?"

Mr. Winter glanced at the barrister, and Reggie explained:

"I have, as you may already realise, taken more than a passive interest in this inquiry, so the questioning largely devolves on me. First, tell me why you adopted the name of Pyne?"

"Simple enough, though stupid, I now admit. When I returned from the States I was very hard up, but managed to pick up a subsistence by writing for the sporting press, and occasionally backing horses. But I knew that this could not last, so I tried to get some financial interests in the City. In doing so I made the acquaintance of a man named Dodge, and committed myself to the underwriting of a new venture named the Springbok Mine. This fell through at the time, and with this collapse came other demands. I hate being worried with creditors, so when my sister offered to take and furnish a flat for me, near her own, I thought I would live quietly for a time and conceal my name so as to have peace there at any rate. Therefore, I took the name of a friend in America, little thinking that I should land both him and myself into such trouble by doing it. That is the explanation. By the way, what has happened to Pyne?"

"He is all right. He expects to see you to-night. You know Sir Charles Lyle, do you not?"

"Yes."

"Intimately?"

"Well, no, not exactly. He and I were at school together at Brighton, at Childe's place."

"At Brighton?"

"Yes. I was a little chap when Lyle was a senior. After he left the headmaster changed the school to a place called Seton Lodge, at Putney, on account of cramming operations for Army exams."

"Then you were at Putney?"

"Yes, for two years."

"And Lyle was not?"

"No; that I am sure of."

"Have you and Sir Charles been friendly since?"

Mensmore's face hardened somewhat as he answered: "I have seen very little of him, and have hardly ever spoken to him."

"Why? Did you quarrel?"

"N-no, but we just did not happen to meet. Bear in mind I was in business some years ago, and I am not yet thirty."

"Did you know Lady Delia?"

"I have never, to my knowledge, seen her."

"How, then, can you account for the fact that she visited your flat at Raleigh Mansions on November 6?"

"I say that such a statement is mere nonsense."

"But if it can be proved?"

"It cannot."

"I assure you, on my honour, that it can."

"But look here, Brett. Why should she come to see me? I question greatly if she knew of my existence."

"Nevertheless, it is the fact."

"I can only tell you it is not. I left London on November 8, and on the two previous evenings I dined alone. Mrs. Robinson, my housekeeper, can tell you that not another soul entered my flat for a week prior to my departure, except my sister and—and—I had forgotten—some workmen."

"Some workmen?"

"Yes; some fellows from a furniture warehouse."

"What were they doing?"

"Well, don't you see, I told you I was not well off, and my sister furnished my flat for me, in August last that was, but the drawing-room was left bare for a time. Just before I left for France she decided to refurnish her drawing-room, and she gave me the whole fit-out. The things were brought in by the men who came with her purchases."

At this astounding statement Brett and Winter were utterly taken aback. It was with difficulty that the barrister enunciated his next words clearly.

"Can you tell me with quite absolute certainty, the date of this change of the furniture?"

"Oh, yes. It was the day before I started for the Riviera that must have been November 7th."

"Are you positive of this?"

"Undoubtedly. Is it a matter of importance? Gwen, you know all about it. Besides, the bills for your new furniture will show the date of delivery, and it was the same day."

Mrs. Hilmer's face was hidden by her veil, but she nodded silently.

Three people in the room knew the terrible significance of Mensmore's straightforward words; but as yet he was personally unaware of the direction towards which the investigation now tended.

"Let us analyse the matter carefully," said Brett, who had recovered his self-possession, though he was almost terrified at the possibilities of the situation. "Did the whole of the contents of your drawing-room come from your sister's flat?"

"Every stick. There was nothing there before but the bare boards."

"Do you remember a handsome ornamental fender being amongst these articles?"

"Perfectly. My housekeeper said the men broke it during the transit. They denied this, and looked for the piece chipped off, but could not find it. She told me about it that night."

"Did you mention it to Mrs. Hilmer?"

"No. To tell the honest truth, Gwen and I had quarrelled a couple of days before. That is to say, we disagreed seriously about a certain matter, and it was this which led to my making off to Monte Carlo. Therefore it was hardly likely I should mention such a trivial matter to her."

"May I ask what you quarrelled about?"

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"I have told her since that it ought to be made known, but she has implored me not to reveal it, so I cannot. But she will tell you herself that we agreed I should be at liberty to make this guarded explanation."

Brett and the detective again exchanged glances of wondering comprehension.

"I do not think we need question Mr. Mensmore further," said the barrister to Winter.

"No," was the reply. "The matter is clear enough. Mrs. Hillmer must tell us how that furniture came to be transferred from her premises on the morning of the 7th."

"If she chooses."

Brett's tone was sad, and its ominous significance was not lost on his hearers.

Mrs. Hillmer raised her veil. Her face was deathly pale and tense in its fixed agony. But in her eyes was a light which gave a curious aspect of resolve to her otherwise painful aspect of utter grief.

"I do not choose," she said quietly, looking, not at Brett or the detective, but at her brother.

For a little while no one spoke. Mensmore at last broke out eagerly:

"Don't act absurdly, Gwen. I cannot even guess where all this talk about the furniture is leading us, but I do know that you are as innocent of any complicity in Lady Delia's death as I am, so it is better for you to help forward the inquiry than to retard it."

"I am not innocent," said Mrs. Hilmer, her words falling with painful distinctness upon the ears of the three men. "Heaven help me! I am responsible for it!"

Her brother started to his feet, and caught her by the shoulder.

"What folly is this?" he cried. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Fully. My words are like sledge-hammers. I will for ever feel their weight. I tell you I am responsible for the death of Lady Delia Lyle."

"Then how did she die, Mrs. Hilmer?" said Brett, whose glance sought to read her soul.

"I do not know. I do not want to know. It matters little to me."

"In other words, you are assuming a responsibility you should not bear. You were not even aware of this poor lady's death until I told you. Why should you seek to avert suspicion from others merely because Lady Delia is shown to have met her death in your apartments?"

"But how is it shown?" interrupted Mensmore vehemently, for he was more disturbed by his sister's unaccountable attitude than he had ever been at the serious charge against himself.

"Easily enough," said Winter, feeling that he ought to have some share in the conversation. "A piece of the damaged fender placed in your rooms, Mr. Mensmore, was found in the murdered lady's head."

"Was it?" he cried. "Then, by Heaven, I refuse to see my sister sacrificed for anybody's sake. She has borne too long the whole burthen of misery and degradation. I tell you, Gwen, that if you do not save yourself I will save you against your will. That furniture came to my room because——"

"Bertie, I beseech you, for the sake of the woman you love, to spare me." Mrs. Hilmer flung herself on her knees before him and caught hold of his hands, whilst she burst into a storm of tears.

Mensmore was unnerved. He turned to Brett, and said:

"Help me in this miserable business, old chap. I don't know what to say or do; my sister had no more connection with Lady Delia's death than I had. This statement on her part is mere hysteria arising from other circumstances altogether."

"That I feel acutely," said the barrister. "Yet someone killed her, and, whatever the pain that may be caused, and whoever may suffer, I am determined that the truth shall come out."

"I tell you," wailed Mrs. Hilmer between her sobs, "that I must bear all the blame. Why do you hesitate? She was killed in my house, and I confess my guilt."

"This *is* a rum business," growled Mr. Winter aloud, but half-unconsciously.

At that moment the door opened unexpectedly, and Smith entered.

Before Brett had time to vociferate at his astounded servitor the man stuttered an excuse:

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but Sir Charles Lyle has called, and wants to know if you will be disengaged soon."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Letter.

Quick on the heels of the footman's stammered explanation came the voice of Sir Charles himself:

"Sorry to disturb you, Brett, if you are busy, but I must see you for a moment on a matter of great importance."

There was that in his utterance which betokened great excitement. He was not visible to the occupants of the room, but during the audible silence that followed his words, they could hear him stamping about in the passage, impatiently awaiting Brett's presence.

Mrs. Hilmer quietly collapsed on the floor. She had fainted.

Brett rushed out, calling for Mrs. Smith, and responding to Sir Charles Lyle's proffered statement as to the reason for his presence by the startling cry:

"Wait a bit, Lyle. There's a lady in a faint inside. We must attend to her at once."

Mrs. Smith, fortunately, was at hand, and with the help of her ministrations, Mrs. Hilmer gradually regained her senses.

After a whispered colloquy with Winter, the barrister said to Mensmore:

"You must get your sister to her residence as quickly as possible. She is far too highly strung to bear any further questioning to-night. Perhaps to-morrow, when you and she have talked matters fully together, you may be able to send for us and clear up this wretched business."

For answer Mensmore silently pressed his hand. With the help of the housekeeper he led his sister from the room, passing Sir Charles Lyle in the hall. The baronet politely turned aside, and Mensmore did not look at him, being far too engrossed with his sister to pay heed to aught else at the moment. As for Mrs. Hilmer, she was in such a state of collapse as to be practically unconscious of her surroundings.

She managed to murmur at the door:

"Where are you taking me to, Bertie?"

"Home, dear."

"Home? Oh, thank Heaven!"

They all heard her, and even the detective was constrained to say:

"Poor thing, she needn't have been afraid. She is suffering for someone else."

Sir Charles Lyle took Brett's arm.

"What on earth is going on?" he said.

"Merely a foolish woman worrying herself about others," replied Brett, grimly.

"But those people were my old friends, Mensmore and his sister?"

"Yes."

"What are they doing here?"

"Mensmore has been brought back to London by Mrs. Hilmer to face the allegations made against him with regard to your wife's disappearance. They came here by their own appointment, and——"

"Did I not tell you that this charge against Mensmore was wild folly on the face of it?"

"So it seems, when we have just discovered that your wife was killed in his sister's house, and then Mrs. Hilmer persists in declaring that she was responsible for the crime."

(*Continued on page 286.*)

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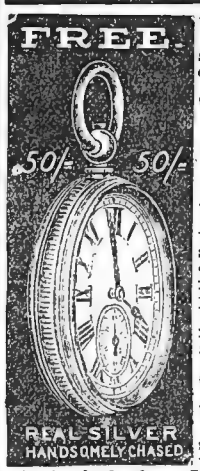

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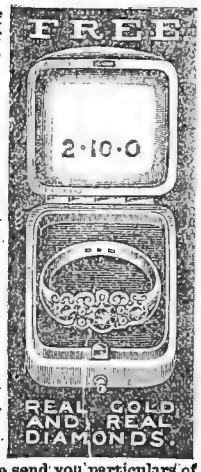

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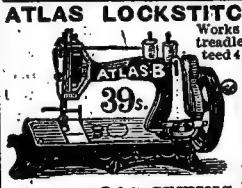

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"Look here, Brett. Don't you go and lose your head like everybody else mixed up in this wretched business. My wife is not dead."

"What!" The cry was a double one, for both Brett and Winter gave simultaneous utterance to their amazement.

"It is true. She is alive all the time. I have had a letter from her."

"A letter. Surely, Lyle——"

"I am neither mad nor drunk. It reached me by this morning's post. I came here with it as fast as I could travel. I have been in the train all day, and am nearly fainting from hunger."

"Where is it?" cried Winter. "Is it genuine?"

"I could swear to her writing amidst a thousand letters. Here it is. I have brought some old correspondence of hers for the purpose of comparison, as I could hardly believe my eyes when I first received it."

Brett was so dumfounded at this remarkable development that he could but mutely take the document produced by the baronet and read it.

He himself recognised Lady Delia's handwriting, which he had often seen—a clear, bold, well-defined script, more like the caligraphy of a banker than of a fashionable lady.

The letter was dated "February 1st," bore no other superscription, and read as follows:

My Dear Charles,—I have just seen in the newspapers the announcement of my death, and the theories set on foot to account for my disappearance on November 6th. This seems to convey to me the strange fact that you have not received the explanation I sent you of my reasons for leaving London so suddenly. Otherwise you must have kept your own counsel very closely. However, I do not now desire to reopen the question of motive; let it suffice to say that no one save myself was responsible for my disappearance, and that neither you nor anyone acquainted with me will ever see me again. Do not search for me; it will be time wasted. If you have legal proof of my death and wish to marry again, be satisfied. Tear up this letter and forget it. I am dead—to you and to the world. You can neither refuse to accept the genuineness of this letter nor trace me by reason of it, as I have taken such precautions that the latter course will be impossible. Let me repeat—forget me.

Delia.

The barrister carefully refolded the sheet after scrutinising the water-mark against the light, and noting that the paper was British made; he then examined the envelope. The obliterating post-mark was "London, February 4, 9 p.m., West Strand." The office of delivery was "Wensley, February 6."

"Posted at the West Strand Post Office on Saturday night," he said. "Detained in London all Sunday, and delivered to you this morning in the north."

"Exactly."

"It was written three days earlier, if the date be accurate. So the writer is somewhere in Europe."

"That's how I take it," said Sir Charles.

"Unless the whole thing is a fraud."

"How can it be a fraud? I am sure as to the handwriting. Why, even you yourself, Brett, must have a good recollection of my wife's style."

"Undoubtedly. No man born could swear that this was not Lady Delia's production."

"Well, what are we to do?"

"And what did Mrs. Hilmer mean by kicking up that fuss when we spoke to her?" interpolated Winter. "I'll take my oath that some one was killed in her house, else how comes it that a woman found in the Thames at Putney is carrying about in her head some of Mrs. Hilmer's ironwork? I wish she hadn't fainted just now. Why, she said herself that she was the cause of Lady Delia's death, and here Lady Delia writes to say she is alive. This business is beyond me, but Mrs. Hilmer has got to explain a good deal yet before I am done with her."

The detective's wrath at this check in the hunt for a criminal did not appeal to Sir Charles Lyle. "You can please yourself, Mr. Winter, of course," he said coldly; "but so far as I am concerned, I will respect my wife's wishes, and let the matter rest where it is."

"My dear Lyle," said the barrister, "such a course is impossible. Assuming that her ladyship is really alive, why did she leave you?"

"How can I tell? She herself refuses to give a reason. She apparently stated one in a letter which never reached me, as you know. She has selfishly caused me a world of suffering and misery for three long months. I refuse to be plagued in the matter any further." Sir Charles was excited and angry. He was in bitter revolt against circumstances.

"Do you intend to show this letter to Lady Delia's relatives?" said Brett, at a loss for the time, to discuss the situation coherently.

"I do not know. What would you advise? I trust fully to your judgment. But is it not better to obey her wishes?—to forget, as she puts it?"

"We must decide nothing hastily. I am perplexed beyond endurance by this business. There is so much that is wildly impossible in its irreconcilable features. I must have time. Will you give me a copy of the letter?"

"Certainly, keep it yourself. We have all seen it."

"Thank you." Brett placed the envelope and its contents in his pocket-book. Then, turning to the detective, he said:

"Now, Mr. Winter, I want to ask you a favour. Do not worry Mrs. Hilmer until you hear from me."

"By all means, Mr. Brett. But am I to report to the Commissioner that Lady Delia has been found, or has, at any rate, explained that she is not dead?"

"There is no immediate necessity why a report of any kind should be made?"

"None."

"Then leave matters where they are at present."

"But why?" put in Sir Charles. "Is it not better to put an end to all inquiries, at least so far as my wife is concerned? It is her desire, and, I may add, my own, now that I know something of her fate."

"Of course, if you wish it, Lyle, I have no valid objection."

"Oh, no, no. Do not look at it that way. I leave the ultimate decision entirely to you."

"In that case, then, I recommend complete silence in all quarters at present."

The detective left them, and as he passed out into Victoria Street his philosophy could find but one comprehensive dictum. "This *is* a rum go," he muttered, unconsciously plagiarising himself on many previous occasions.

The baronet now sat down, and meditatively chewed the handle of his umbrella.

"What is this nonsense Mensmore's sister talked about being responsible for my wife's death?" he said.

"I do not pretend to understand," answered Brett. "Little more than a week ago she learnt for the first time of your wife's supposed murder. Of that I am quite positive. She then feared that her brother was implicated, and without trusting me with the reasons for her belief, she took such steps as she thought best to safeguard him."

"Took steps! What steps?" Sir Charles jerked the words out impetuously.

"She went off after him to the south of France, and found him in Florence. What she said I cannot guess, but the result was their visit here to-night. During our interview it came out, quite by accident, that some furniture was taken from her place to her brother's on the morning of November 6th, thus shifting the venue of Lady Delia's death—or imagined death I must now say—from No. 12 Raleigh Mansions, to No. 61. This discovery was as startling to Mrs. Hilmer as to us, for she forthwith protested that the whole affair arose from her fault, and practically asked the detective to arrest her on the definite charge of murder."

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

First of all I want you to read the two new series of stories which start in this number under the respective titles of "A Keeper of Secrets," and "Tales Told Off Duty." I think you will find them to your liking. When you have finished them, and also the other stories in the number, you might hand the paper to your friends. Incidentally, you will thus do a double favour, first to your friends, who will be provided with a budget of good reading which they might otherwise miss, and secondly to myself by making *Short Stories* known to them and thus securing potential new readers.

❦❦❦

Writing from Arbroath, "E. W."—who is a lady—regrets the "alteration made of late with regard to the 'Anecdote Competition' in *Short Stories*.

"Till a few weeks back anecdotes had to deal with a certain subject, but now they may deal with any subject.

"I am sure numbers of your readers will agree with me that the competition is far more interesting when just dealing with a given subject.

"Hoping that I don't give any offence, and with all good wishes for *S.S.*"

❦❦❦

Of course, there's no offence, dear madam. You do me the greatest kindness by criticising the paper. It is by such means that I get to know what readers like or dislike.

I am quite ready to alter the conditions of the Storyette Competition if it is so desired. Perhaps other readers will let me have their opinions on the matter.

❦❦❦

"Walter," who is seventeen years of age, has a disappointment to chronicle. It is that the maidens of real life do not equal the damsels of fiction in physical beauty "by long chalks." For some months he has been a diligent reader of *Short Stories* and has allowed himself to fall in love with some of the heroines he has read of therein. "They are sometimes described as being so sweet and charming that it is impossible to help loving them," he says, "but, unfortunately, one does not meet their like in actual life. Here in Manchester, at any rate, there seems to be a dearth of even passably pretty girls."

I hasten to disclaim all participation in this opinion of "fair Mancunians." Manchester has certainly its fair share of feminine beauty. Many years ago when I was staying at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, I remember meeting the most charming girl I ever——but that's another, and purely domestic story.

No, "Walter" you are not right in what you say. The world contains plenty of pretty and charming girls if you have an eye for them. Doubtless, you will meet one all in good time, and when the inevitable does happen, say in ten years, don't forget to send me a piece of cake.

❦❦❦

Strangely enough, a subject akin to the foregoing is raised by "Admirer," who maintains that Norwich (his place of residence), in his opinion, contains more pretty girls than any other city of its size.

I don't know Norwich very well, but, speaking generally, this strikes me as being rather a sweeping statement. Feminine charms abound in every place, and no one town can lay claim to anything like a monopoly. At the same time, I am bound to admit that one seems to meet more pretty faces in some places than in others. Speaking off-hand, I should place Richmond and Brixton in the place of honour among London's suburbs; while, so far as provincial towns are concerned, Bath and Eastbourne have quite their share of beauty. But, then, one's experience is necessarily limited, and with wider knowledge would inevitably come modification of opinion. Probably readers whose experience has differed from mine will have different ideas on the subject. As far as space allows, *Short Stories* is willing to give such opinions an airing.

❦❦❦

"E. Elton" (Leicester) is proud of his country's flag, and is especially delighted with our series, "The Lion's Wars," which he says have taught him more than he ever knew before of events which have had so much to do with the building up of our glorious Empire. He thinks that this series ought to be very widely read, to which I say most heartily, "Hear, hear!"

❦❦❦

"Minnie" is anxious to know whether her lover loves her or no. They were engaged, and their parents forbade them to have anything to do with each other; so they parted, promising to wait and be true. Now, whenever she goes into the town, she sees him talking and walking with other girls. She asked him to return her photograph, and he declined to do so. There is someone else who loves her, but she does not know what to do, as she promised to wait for James. ——— He is not treating you as he should, "Minnie." Ask him what he means; and if you find that he is not keeping his promise to you, I should tell him that you do not wish to have anything further to do with him.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 5,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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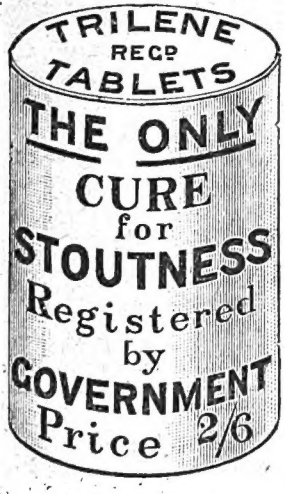
ALL FAT PEOPLE

Can be **CURED** by taking

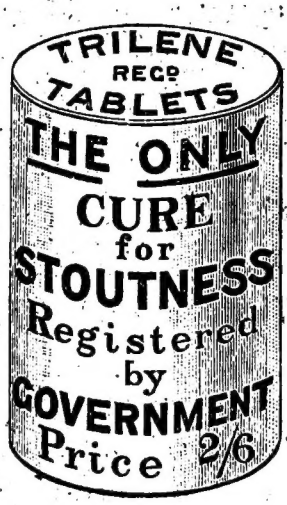
TRILENE TABLETS Regd.



For a few weeks. They will safely REDUCE WEIGHT and CURE CORPULENCY PERMANENTLY, whether Abdominal or General. They are small, agreeable, harmless, sent privately, and never fail to Improve both HEALTH and FIGURE without change of Diet.

An English Countess writes: "Your Trilene Tablets act admirably."

Send 2s. 6d. to THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 Finsbury Pavement, London, E.C.



SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks, and if I can do anything to promote your interests I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

MRS. DARNLEY SMITH, Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, writes: "Trilene Tablets have reduced my weight very much. I am so much lighter in every way, and better in health."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st. and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

"77 Hindhill Street, Heywood, February 5th, 1898.

"Gentlemen,—I have not quite finished the box of Tablets and am 21lb. lighter. The change is great, and several friends are beginning the treatment, which not only reduces fat but strengthens rheumatic joints—such has been the case with me. "Yours sincerely, M. A. HEYWOOD."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risholme Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44, Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

A. M. PRATT of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

MRS. H. COX, 28 Walnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

MR. WALKER, 230 London Road, Hazelgrove, Stockport, says: "I have used one box and am 14lb. lighter. Send another soon as possible."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs, says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

MRS E. ALEXANDER, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They have reduced me quite 2 stone, and I am now quite cured."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 23. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes "I am reduced from 12st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

MRS. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

Mrs. TAYLOR-ROBINSON, of Tweed Green House, Whalley Range, Manchester, says: "I feel so much lighter and better since taking your Tablets, and am so much thinner that I hardly recognise myself."

Miss A. LONG, of 9 South Parade, Waterford, writes: "Your Tablets have reduced me 14lb."

Miss A. DAWSON, 62 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, says: "Glad to say the Tablets have sufficiently reduced me. I shall always recommend them."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2-6, and am sufficiently reduced."

Mrs. DREW, of 1 Bellevue Gardens, The Nursery, Devizes, writes: "I took Tablets some years ago; they soon reduced me and I have not got stout since. Send me a box for my mother."

THE TRILENE ASSOCIATION, 66 FINSBURY PAVEMENT, LONDON.

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"WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
Sick Headache, Constipation, Wind and Pains in Stomach, Impaired Digestion, Disordered Liver, and Female Ailments.

SALE OVER SIX MILLION BOXES YEARLY.

In Boxes, 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

Shilling packets

Kaputine "the" safe Remedy For Headache

WARNING. *Instead of using the common White Headache Powders, which generally consist entirely of a crude drug, which has been condemned as dangerous by the medical papers, insist on having a bona-fide anti-quack remedy, recommended by such eminent medical authorities as Dr. RAMAGE, L.R.C.P., Dr. THURSTIN, L.R.C.P., late Dr. BOYD-WILLIAMS (Liverpool), the Editor of the Medical Journal, "Health," etc., etc. The name of this safe remedy is KAPUTINE.*

ALL LEADING CHEMISTS SELL IT, OR CAN GET IT FOR YOU IN A FEW HOURS.

Sold by BOOT'S, TAYLOR'S, DAY'S, WHITE'S and other Stores. Most Co-operative Stores sell it.

PACKETS, 1/-. SAMPLES ONE PENNY,

or KAPUTINE LIMITED, HUDDERSFIELD,
will send it FREE for 12 stamps.

WORTH A CROWN A DOSE.

A FREE TRIAL FOR 2/6

THE SET consists of Violin, Bow, Resin, &c.

VIOLIN OUTFIT COMPLETE.
Price £1 10s. 0d.

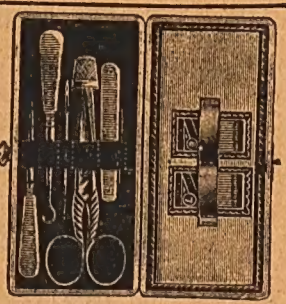
We will supply any reader of SHORT STORIES with one of these VIOLIN OUTFITS on Monthly Payments, as follows:—

You send us **2/6**, with your Name and Address, and we will send one on approval.

If you approve of it you send us **2/6** on receipt and **5/-** each month for 5 months, making the full **30/-**.

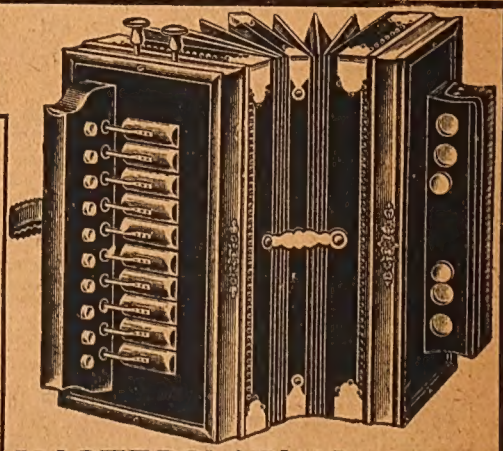
BUT OUR NETT CASH WITH ORDER PRICE IS **27/-** only.

And if you do not approve of the Outfit, we will refund the cash sent, if you return the Outfit at once.



LADY'S COMPANION.

Containing 7 useful articles, exactly as illustrated, with Hall-marked Silver Thimble, in fine Leather Covered Velvet Lined Case.
Price only **4/3.**



MASTERS' 'FAVOURITE' MELODEON 12/6.

We will supply any reader with this Melodeon on receipt of **2/6**. If you approve of it you send us **2/-** on receipt and **2/-** each month for 4 months. Nett Cash With Order Price **11/-** only. If you do not approve of it we will refund the cash if you return the Melodeon at once.

Watches & Clocks Alberts Medals Pendants Wedding rings Gem rings Signet rings Cutlery Cruets Electro-Plate Carvers Tea-pots Field glasses Pins Brooches

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